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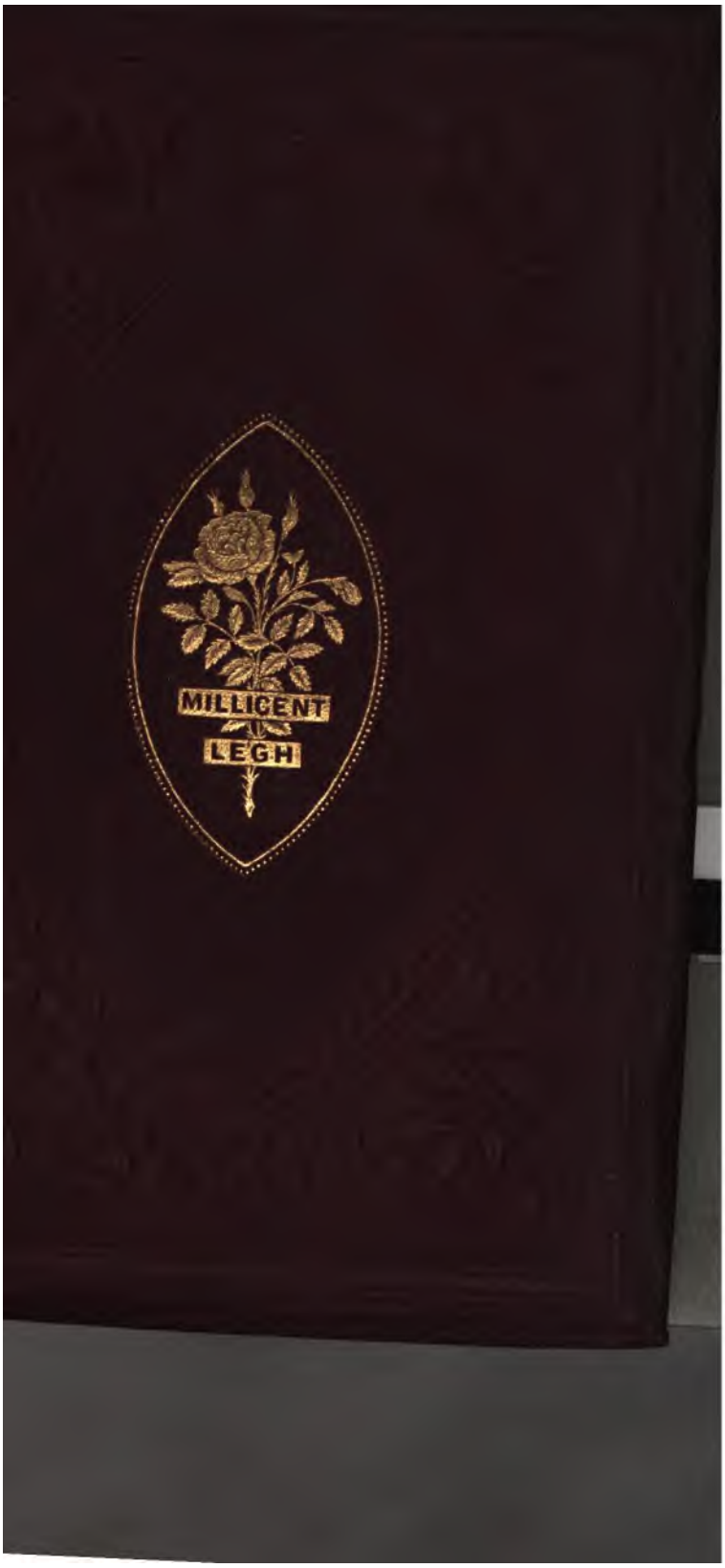
MILLICENT
LEGH

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Page 211.

MILLICENT AND HER CHILDREN.

MILLICENT LEGH.

A Tale.

BY

EMMA MARSHALL,

AUTHOR OF "BROTHERS AND SISTERS," "HELEN'S DIARY,"
"BROOK SILVERTONE," ETC.

"Meek souls there are, who little dream
Their daily strife an angel's theme.
* * * *
And there are souls that seem to dwell
Above this earth — so rich a spell
Floats round their steps, where'er they move,
From hopes fulfilled and mutual love."
Christian Year, "Wednesday before Easter."

SEELEY, JACKSON, AND HALLIDAY, FLEET STREET.
LONDON. MDCCCLXVI.

[*The right of translation is reserved.*]

250. g. 293.

MILLICENT LEGH.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW HOME.

"If prosperity doth bubble
Briskly in thy golden cup,
Raise it to pale lips that trouble,
Sorrowfully parcheth up.
Riches generously given
May be found again in heaven."

"THE DOVE ON THE CROSS."

THE sunbeams of a brilliant May afternoon played with the quivering shadows cast by the young leaves upon the grassy slopes of Sidcote Park. A soft breeze was rustling in the branches of the elms and limes, and whispering with the sound of "falling showers" amongst the beeches and poplars, while it swayed with a gentle movement the more sturdy boughs of the oaks, still clothed in their russet dress of rich brown, which had as

yet but faintly caught the emerald tint of every other tree in the park. Deep in the tangled glades of the brushwood the graceful deer raised shy and wondering eyes as the sound of carriage wheels in the avenue broke the stillness, hitherto disturbed only by the sudden whirr of a pheasant as it rose in the air, or the distant voices of children at play in the cowslip fields, or the first carol of the thrushes and blackbirds, soon to swell into the full chorus of their evensong of praise.

Sidcote Park, wide-spread and undulating, was always beautiful, but on an afternoon like this it was in its glory. As the carriage drove rapidly up between the overshadowing branches of the stately elms, Millicent Legh's heart was too full for words; for she was coming home—home to her husband's house—a bride of scarcely more than one-and-twenty summers; and all nature seemed to wear her gayest, loveliest air to bid her welcome. Millicent was very still and silent, and a strange feeling of mingled shyness and contentment crept over her. At last the carriage swept round the closely-cut lawn in front of the house, which, like everything else, had a bright and smiling aspect. A spacious dwelling it was: modern, but not too new; large, but not grand, with pretty bay windows,

breaking the uniformity of the building, wreathed about with a wealth of roses and clematis, and jutting out upon the flower garden and terraces; while these were set off by a back-ground of firs and larches, now hanging out their bright green tassels beneath the sombre plumes of their winter dress.

The entrance door was thrown open as the carriage stopped, and Sir Stephen Legh led his wife into the hall. Here a number of servants were collected, who smiled and curtseyed their welcome to Lady Legh. She felt too much as if she were in a dream to respond as perhaps she ought to have done, and was glad that Sir Stephen made all the needful acknowledgments, and took her to the sitting-room prepared for her especial use; here she felt more at home than in the drawing-room, where her husband only lingered a moment, with the words—

"You know all this part of the house; we will go up-stairs."

The sitting-room was intended to surprise and please Lady Legh, and it was with a kiss that she was welcomed here.

"This room was my mother's," Sir Stephen said, "and I wished you to have it. There is on view in the house equal to this," he continued,

as he went to the window. "Between those hills to the right the sea lies; and when this house was built, on the site of the hideous erection of red brick, which some ancestor of ours achieved in Queen Anne's time, my mother petitioned that from some point she might, if possible, see the glimmer of the sea. She was very fond of it, I remember—very fond," he went on, scarcely heeding that his wife made no reply. "It was strange that the great sorrow of her life should have been so connected with the sea. You know my brother and my only sister were lost off Seaforth. But," he said, changing his tone, and resuming the cool collected manner habitual to him, "you are tired, my dearest, and you must lie down and rest now. They will bring you some tea, and you will be quite fresh by dinner. I must go and see what letters are in my study, and speak to Parker and Mrs. Bligh. By the by, dearest, you must give her a kind word soon, and try to let all the servants see you appreciate their welcome. They are most of them old friends, all really valuable, and I make a point of treating them with kindness."

Millicent felt that this was an implied reproach at the way in which she had entered her

new home. She roused herself, and felt how stupid and awkward she must seem.

"Stephen," she said—it was the first word she had spoken; "Stephen, please forgive me if I am a little bewildered at first; don't think me ungracious; but—but—"

A tremulous sound in her own voice warned her to stop. She had only been married two months, but she had learned in that time that her husband did not like any great evidence of emotion. He was leaving the room, but turned back.

"My dearest, you are over-tired, I think; the journey was too long to-day; it was a pity we did not divide it." And then, with another kiss, he left his wife.

The pent-up tears did come then, and relieved Millicent wonderfully; and by the time the maid brought her tea in its pretty service of lily of the valley china, the spell seemed broken, and the first oppression of strangeness and newness passed away.

"Three letters, my lady," said the maid, as she put the tea on a table by her mistress; "and Mrs. Bligh would like to know if your ladyship will dine at seven."

"Yes, at Sir Stephen's usual hour." And then, remembering her husband's injunction, she

said, "I can see Mrs. Bligh if she wishes to come up."

Mrs. Bligh was not slow in availing herself of the permission; and perhaps a little over-straining her air of respect and deference, stood for some time expatiating on her desire to render everything comfortable for her ladyship, begging that if any alterations were wished for, she might be told, and expressing her hope that her ladyship would live many and many happy years at Sidcote Park.

Millicent sat and smiled, and nodded acquiescence and thanks, and was only too glad when the interview came to an end. Lady Legh instinctively felt that every servant in that house remembered how altered her position was—that is, altered in all outward form and semblance; for surely in the eyes of Mrs. Bligh no contrast could be greater than that afforded by the little red brick house in Bridge Street, Dunsford,—where she had lived almost up to the time of her marriage, the care-taker of two step-brothers and a sister, the constant companion of their nervous and fragile mother,—and the beautiful home to which she had now come as the wife of Sir Stephen Legh.

When Mrs. Bligh left her, Millicent drew a

chair near the window and looked out on the view, which Sir Stephen justly said was the best the house afforded. Far away were soft grassy hills which hid the line of sea, except in one place, where it lay a band of deepest blue, the mirror of the cloudless sky above it. Then to the right could be seen the towers of the Dunsford churches, the roofs of the houses, and the tall chimneys of Mr. Roberts's cloth mills; while the shimmer of the narrow river showed Millicent where the old stone bridge spanned it, close to the street on the outskirts of the town, where her old home had been. Immediately before the house the park stretched away, diversified by many a gentle rise and fall, and planted tastefully with trees, now in all their fresh beauty, above which the spire of St. Mary's, Sidcote, pointed heavenward. The mother of whom Sir Stephen always spoke with deep and touching reverence, had built and endowed this church to the memory of her husband, her son, and her only daughter. Millicent knew how she had laid the foundation stone with trembling hand, and remembered how her son's arm supported her as she did so. Long before the building stood complete, Lady Legh had gone to her rest, and to Sir Stephen was left the work of finishing the church, and presenting the

living to the son of his father's earliest friend, Mr. Howard. Five years before the time of which we write, the church had been consecrated, and the pretty parsonage was inhabited by Mr. Howard and his mother. The new clergyman brought a fresh element to Dunsford and its neighbourhood. Still waters were stirred, new hopes and aspirations awakened, religion was shown to be a great reality for every need of daily life—for every exigency of sorrow, and pain, and death. Faith was set forth as active and practical—not the mere assent to any prescribed form of opinion, but a living principle within the soul, which should have its fruit unto holiness, and the end—the bright, glorious end—everlasting life!

Millicent greeted the spire of the church from her window as a friend, and for a few moments she bowed her head upon her hands and asked that whatever the thorns in the earthly path, now lying so fair and tempting before her—whatever the thorns and whatever the flowers, she might not forget to glorify Him whose child she was, and by whose mercy she was inheritor of a home, fairer far, and more beautiful than this earthly one to which she had now come as wife and mistress.

The sound of the dressing bell roused her from her deep thought; then came the maid to summon her to the next room, where one of her simple evening dresses lay upon the bed, and as she rose to go, the three unopened letters caught her eye. Half wondering that she had so entirely forgotten them, and taking them in her hand, she read them, while her maid brushed and combed her long, luxuriant hair, as she sat before the glass in her bed-room. The seals of the first two were broken, and the mirror reflected smiles—mere letters of congratulation from acquaintance and friend, a little overwrought and rapturous, perhaps, but they might be sincere nevertheless. Then came the third, and the glass no longer reflected smiles, but an anxious, troubled expression, which seemed ready to give place to tears, and even Ruth's presence could not restrain a whispered word of amazement and perplexity, and "What will he say? What will he say?" twice repeated. The letter fell from her hand, and Ruth, stooping to pick it up, recalled Lady Legh to herself; the startled pale face, too, reflected in the glass, where Ruth's eyes met her's inquiringly, also steadied her. The letter was refolded, and with a sigh, Millicent laid it on her dressing table and

made some indifferent remark to her maid about the pleasure of being settled at last, and asking her if she were not glad to have the constant packing and unpacking over.

When Ruth had left her, Lady Legh again took up the letter, again read it through, and then with the thought that she could not spoil the first evening at home, with what she was sure could not be pleasant news for her husband, she went down-stairs to the drawing-room. In her simple girlish dress of white muslin, with its blue ribbons, her shining, abundant hair tied with the same colour, Millicent looked very pretty and very youthful, almost like the daughter rather than the bride of Sir Stephen Legh. He was standing by the window when she went into the room, reading a letter, and he had several more in his hand.

"Ah," he said, as he turned at the sound of the light footstep, "you look quite rested now;" and he put his letters into his coat pocket, while he drew her hand within his arm, and took her in to dinner.

Millicent felt a sense of shyness and strangeness creeping over her again, as she took her place at the table, and here she was grave and quiet. When the servants were gone, she began

to talk more easily; and when Sir Stephen proposed that they should stroll out on the terrace, she sprang up delighted.

"I must get a cloak first," she said; and she was tripping away, when Sir Stephen called her.

"Ring for it, dearest; send a message to Ruth to bring it to you."

Millicent obeyed, and a rosy flush came to her face. "I forgot," she said, "I have so many people to wait on me. I have been so accustomed to get everything for myself."

"Yes, and to do too much for other people also, I suspect. Now the tables are turned;" and he added with a smile, "I like to think it is so."

"But, Stephen," Millicent began, as he wrapped the cloak the maid had brought around her, "you will let me do something, won't you? I was going to ask you to let me go on with my teaching at St. Mary's School; and I told Mr. Howard I would undertake many things which his mother's bad health prevents her from superintending personally. You will let me fulfil my promise, won't you?"

"I don't think I shall," he answered. "You were not Millicent Legh when you made it. No, darling, no. There are plenty of other people to be found for all these kind of things, and I could

not have you tie yourself with them. But let us talk of something else. Here is a letter from Florence, saying that she and Henry wish to be our first guests. They propose coming on Monday. There is a little note for you enclosed. No doubt it is as prettily expressed as mine is." And Sir Stephen put both into her hands.

"Oh, I am so sorry they are coming," was Millicent's exclamation; "so soon, too."

"I am not very glad either," was the reply. "I mean, I think a few days' grace would have been acceptable; but you will see we cannot well get out of it."

Millicent *did* see that, when she read the gracefully-expressed little notes, which were overflowing with affection—perhaps, like Mrs. Bligh's respect, a little overdone. Florence Legh was the wife of Sir Stephen's first cousin. She had been his ward, and she addressed him as "Dearest Guardian." In days that were past, Millicent and she had been something of friends; that is to say, when Florence Mason and her mother had been staying for months together at Sidcote, Florence found it convenient sometimes to ask little Millie Gardiner to fill up a gap at archery, for croquet was unknown then, or come after dinner to take a part in a trio or duet, or

talk to some hopelessly dull guest. This was three years ago now. Since then she had lost her mother, married Mr. Legh, and had a little son, Sir Stephen's godchild. The last note Millicent had received from her was six months before this time, when just after Millicent had removed with her mother to Sherstone for the education of the two boys, Sir Stephen had asked her to be his wife; and her friends had raised a storm of congratulations and surprise. Mrs. Legh's letter then had been short, and an under-current of something not quite pleasant had run through it. Now the note on lilac paper, with a pretty cypher at the head, was indeed very loving, and Millicent returned it to her husband with an impatient gesture.

"It is not mine," he said, with a slight curve of his lip; "you forget it is addressed to 'Darling Millicent.' Well, poor Florence has really warm feelings. Let us give her credit for that. And Henry is good-natured and inoffensive. He is my nearest living relation, and it would not do to shirk them, especially as they are really passing so close to Dunsford. There," he said, pausing at the end of the terrace, "that opening in the trees is very well managed. I must praise poor old Davis for that. The only thing is, I am

afraid we have opened up a corner of the town which shows Roberts's tall chimneys, and that great pretentious-looking house on the Seaforth road he has just finished."

"Yes," said Millicent dreamily. She did not like to be reminded of Mr. Roberts just then. It was a jarring chord in the music of the evening. That letter which had caused her so much vexation concerned this very Mr. Roberts, the owner of the great cloth mill, and the builder of the pretentious house. The moon was rising over the Sidcote woods, and the birds had ceased their song. The delicious twilight of the early summer was wrapping everything in its mantle. The wind had gone down at sunset, and scarcely a leaf stirred. Sir Stephen and his wife passed through the flower-garden, and then he said she must go in; it was getting damp and chill. The temptation was strong not to break the quiet happiness of that hour by any unpleasant subject, "but it is better not to hide anything from him, even for an hour," she thought; and so, clinging to his arm, she said,

"One more turn along the terrace, please, Stephen. I had a letter this afternoon, about which I want to tell you. It concerns my poor mother."

The tone was such that Sir Stephen said immediately, "What about her, dearest? Is she ill?"

"No—but—she is going to be married—"

"Ah!" he interrupted, "I am not surprised. She has lost the staff on which she leaned so long. No doubt the boys, and Ida too, are rather more than she can manage now. Well, I think it is a good thing, if the choice is a wise one."

"That is what I am afraid it is not. Oh," she went on, "it is difficult for me to tell you, because I wish—I do wish—my mother had done this before I was really married to you; then you could have withdrawn, if you had liked to do so. The man mamma is going to marry is Mr. Roberts."

"Mr. Roberts, the cloth-manufacturer, here? Surely not!" It was all he said.

Millicent felt an icy chill shoot through her, and for a few minutes there was silence.

"I know it must be very disagreeable to you," she went on. "If he were a poor man, I feel you would not mind it; but I think the riches have tempted my mother. She speaks of the advantage she shall be able to gain for my brothers and for Ida. She goes over the long struggle she has had with ill health and small means since my father died, and how even the education of the

boys, as day-boys at Sherstone, is more than she knows how to meet. She knows all about Mr. Roberts, of course; she *must* know the sort of man he is; but she is blinded by the prospect of affluence and comfort; and Ida, poor child, is pleased, she says. I wish to judge her gently," Millicent went on; "but it does seem very hard that—that I should be the cause of any discomfort to you—you who have made me so proud and happy by your love."

Millicent raised her face to her husband's, and as she did so the moon shone upon it. He saw her sweet eyes were full of tears; he saw the rosy lips quivering with emotion. He bent down and kissed her, but the voice was not quite natural in which he said,

"My dear child, do not distress yourself;" and there was a sound of proud self-reliance in what followed. "It will not be difficult to keep up a certain degree of intercourse with your stepmother and your brother and sister. Of course any kind of intimacy with a person like Mr. Roberts would be distasteful. He is vulgar and obtrusive, you and I both know; but that is not all. His antecedents here are too well known to need any comment. The money with which those mills have been worked came to him from a

father who had unscrupulously retained it; and, after declaring himself bankrupt, lived on in luxury and comfort, while his creditors were crippled, and, in some instances, utterly ruined. This was the father's fault, openly talked of here when I was a boy, and the son has in no wise wiped out the stain upon his honour. But we need not discuss this. It seems strange and unbecoming to me to talk to my wife of this man at all. I am only sorry for this untoward step of Mrs. Gardiner's. But, my darling," he added tenderly, "I have loved you for yourself, and nothing can ever divide us, can it?"

"No; oh, no!" she said earnestly. "Perhaps it would have been all too beautiful and sweet, if some little cross had not been sent. My poor mother is always so easily persuaded, and it seems that this has all been arranged since our marriage eight weeks ago. Mr. Roberts has a married sister at Sherstone, and he was there on a visit when he made this proposal. Georgie and Esdaile are to continue at Sherstone in Dr. Samson's house, and the wedding is to be at once. Ida will come here to Bella Vista, that is, directly after."

"'Bella Vista!' is that the Italian name of the new mansion? Well, dearest, let us go in now. Ah, there is the prayer-bell, and Mrs. Bligh is

famous for punctuality. Don't worry yourself about this matter. Remember, if you are guided by me in the way to manage a courteous intercourse, all will go well."

"Yes, I see what you mean; but I can't ever forget Georgie and Esdaile, and Ida too, are my father's children, can I?"

"No; and there will be no necessity for it. Though poor Mrs. Gardiner must have forgotten it when she gave them such a step-father. However, there is a natural refinement of feeling and thorough English-like nature which, I think, goes by inheritance. Your father left that to his children, and we may be doubly glad it is so now."

They entered the house together. In the long dining-room the servants were assembled for prayers, and Millicent took her place by her husband's side. He had a well-modulated voice, and read the Psalm for the twelfth evening of the month in a tone which found an echo in his wife's heart. Her life seemed covered with the goodness of the Lord, and she did long to be satisfied with the pleasures of his house, even of his holy temple. Prayers were short and soon over, and then she returned with Sir Stephen to the drawing-room for the tea, which the lengthened walk on the terrace had made them both forget.

Before the clock in the hall had struck midnight, a deep stillness had fallen over Sidcote, and the slumber of the young mistress of that fair home was as calm and untroubled as an infant's, over which the angels, who see God's face, keep watch and guard.

Sir Stephen Legh was right when he said that Colonel Gardiner had left his children an inheritance of natural refinement, and he had indeed little else to bequeath them. Returning on sick leave from India with his second wife and four children, broken down and shattered in health, his thoughts turned to Dunsford, the quiet country town with which he had been familiar as a boy. It was easy of access from Southampton, and here he came to linger out a year or two of sinking health and at last to die. Millicent remembered well the day when she first saw Sir Stephen Legh. That day when, a grave little maiden of twelve years old, she was walking by her father's wheel-chair on the Sidcote road. Sir Stephen was five and thirty then, and looked in her eyes a very old and formidable person. A frail old lady, in deepest mourning, was leaning on his arm, and that family sorrow was then fresh of which Sir Stephen had spoken—the loss of his brother and his fair and only sister by the upsetting of a boat,

which, by the carelessness of a sailor, was wrecked as it was taking a merry party of the young Leghs and their companions to Sir Stephen's yacht lying off Seaforth. This brother had been in Colonel Gardiner's regiment, and when he heard, from the man who dragged the chair, who the lady and gentleman were, her father sent Millicent back to beg them to speak to him. The little faint voice in which the request was made, "Will you please come and speak to papa?" brought down on Millicent a glance from a pair of grave earnest eyes which frightened her. "My father," she had gone on, recovering herself; "Colonel Gardiner, wishes to see you." The moment the name escaped her lips, the lady exclaimed, "Randolph's regiment; the colonel had that name, Stephen;" and she turned immediately to advance to the chair, where the fine stately figure of the soldier-like gentlemanly invalid drew itself erect to greet her, with uncovered head and large piercing eyes, which were bright with the fever then consuming his life away. Millicent could picture the scene distinctly; did picture it very often as she passed the spot where it took place. She remembered her father's words, "Your gallant young son, Lieutenant Randolph Legh, madam, served under me in two engagements. Allow me to express

my sympathy in your loss, which is also the loss of his country." Then came the scarcely-repressed sob of the bereaved mother, and the earnest pressure of the hand as she turned away; while Sir Stephen said, "I shall hope to see more of my brother's friend, and improve the acquaintance thus begun." Flowers and fruit from Sidcote followed this interview, and kindly visits too; but not long before her father died, Sir Stephen and his mother went abroad for two years, and Millicent saw them no more. Next came their return, and the laying the foundation-stone of St. Mary's Church, just at the entrance of Sidcote Park; then Lady Legh's death, the completion and consecration of the church, and the arrival of the Howards; and Millicent met Sir Stephen at intervals at the vicarage. Met him with no suspicion that she was awakening a deeper interest every time, that his visits to Mrs. Gardiner were attributable as much to her attraction for him as out of respect to her father's memory, and that all her unselfish care for her brothers and sister, her unceasing attention to her step-mother, her sweet loving ministry to others in the little red brick house in Bridge Street, were making more and more way in the heart which seemed impervious to the attractions of many young ladies of every rank

and age, who wondered why Sir Stephen Legh persisted in maintaining a bachelor life at Sidcote, when a mistress there was so desirable, and by degrees looked upon him as a hopeless mark for all matrimonial aspirations whatever.

Mrs. Gardiner was accustomed to turn to Millicent for everything, with the indolence of a nature which had lost every original spring or resistance it might have had by an Indian education and an early marriage. She was often prostrate by headaches of great intensity—which perhaps she truly called agonizing—frail, delicate, and pretty; still youthful, too, in appearance, and scarcely forty at the time of Millicent's marriage. She had rested entirely on her for help, with the boys, with Ida, with the two maid-servants, in short, with everything; so the taking away of this prop made Mrs. Gardiner easily persuaded to accept Mr. Roberts's proposal. Every objection was lost sight of in the thought of comfort and ease, and freedom from anxiety, a carriage to drive in, servants to wait upon her, no more anxiety about the boys' education, no more perpetual struggle to make her expenditure suit her income, a struggle which Millicent had most rigorously maintained. A little flattery, a few soft speeches, promises of all possible good for

her children, who were to be counted henceforth as Mr. Roberts's own, and the vulgar, fussy little man carried his point, and hugged himself in the most profound self-congratulation that he had secured such a pretty, elegant mistress for Bella Vista, as the step-mother of Lady Legh, of Sidcote.

CHAPTER II.

THE JUDGMENT OF OLD FRIENDS.

"For he that wrongs his friend
Wrongs himself more, and ever bears about
A silent court of justice in his heart;
Himself the judge and jury, and himself
The prisoner at the bar, ever condemned."
"SEA DREAMS."—TENNYSON.

"So Lady Legh has done you the honour to call to-day. Well, I am glad to hear it, dear mother, that is all."

"Now, Maurice, why should you be so hard upon Millicent? You must know how likely it was that her first day at home was more than filled with Sir Stephen's requirements; a wet day, too. Then, I daresay, he would not let her walk down the park."

"I dare say not," was Mr. Howard's answer. He was writing at a little table in the bay window of the drawing-room at the Vicarage. He often read and wrote there, using his study less

than most clergymen are wont to do, for the very presence of his mother—lying on her sofa close by, all her pleasant little invalid appliances near her—was a help to him rather than a hindrance, and one he often acknowledged. The tie between mother and son was, in this instance, very strong. The earnest, devoted maternal love, on the one side, was met by perfect allegiance and attachment on the other. The two natures were just as opposite in all their leading points as it was possible to imagine. The mother's soft, gentle, and clinging; though with a strict sense of right, and an unwavering truthfulness of character; the son's, stern, uncompromising, and self-reliant, resolute, and almost vehement in his defence of what he believed to be right—a man such as is not so often met in these days, when conventional clipping to a certain form, gives outward uniformity at least. A man who would have died at the stake with a song of praise upon his lips, and who, perhaps, liked too well to meet opposition, on what he conceived to be questions of vital importance, only that he might stand forth and quit him as a man, and show his strength. Far down in the depths of a somewhat rugged nature, however, lay a well-spring of love, which

was sure to flow when least expected, and which a touch from his mother's hand never failed to call forth, as might be seen now, when, as the gathering twilight of the evening stopped his pen, he left his seat, and went to his mother's side, picking up a book she had let fall, re-arranging the cushion at her head, and saying, in a gentler tone, "Her ladyship's visit has tired the dear mother, I am afraid."

"No, Maurice; sit down," she said, pushing towards him the little low chair, "and let us talk about Millicent. She was just as sweet and bright as ever; just as simple and natural; indeed you wrong her. I could have fancied Millicent Gardiner had escaped here, for a German reading, or to discuss the chapter of a favourite book, from the turmoil of little brothers at Bridge Street again."

"Ah! three times a-week was not too often then, mother; now she can be near you for two whole days, and send you neither message nor remembrance."

"One whole day, Maurice; this is only Saturday evening. My dear, I intend to believe in her love for me; you are not to alter me in that."

"Nor do I wish it; however, time will show.

We shall see what influence she has over Sir Stephen; whether she does anything to wake him from his dreams of being a model country gentleman, and a Christian one, too, into the reality that there are many things in which he might amend."

"I scarcely like to hear you speak so of Sir Stephen, Maurice. Remember who built the church, and the schools, and this happy little home of ours. Remember that he fulfilled his mother's wishes to the letter, in placing us here."

"What else could he have done, I wonder? Why, my dear mother, this is but a drop from the ocean of his worldly means; if he would listen to me, and provide for the increasing needs of the poor people, I should be more inclined to judge him tenderly; but, here is the population of the Sidcote district increasing by hundreds—most of the families employed in Roberts's Mills live within it,—and here, Sunday after Sunday, the Dunsford people come to St. Mary's in their silks and feathers, and the poor, my poor, can find neither standing room or scarcely a corner in which to kneel down and pray. When I represent this to Sir Stephen, and ask to be allowed at least to build the transepts by sub-

scription, he refuses point blank: the transepts would spoil the symmetry of the church, unless erected both at once, and highly decorated, like the rest of the church. He cannot afford to do this, he says, and he refuses to allow public subscription to interfere with a memorial church. If the time comes when he can do it, he will; and meanwhile, things must rest as they are."

"When did all this pass between you and Sir Stephen?"

"To-day; I went to see him on purpose. He was in a particularly hard and ungracious mood."

"While you, Maurice, were in a particularly gentle and conciliating one; is that it?" And his mother stroked his hand, which was playing with the fringe of her shawl, and looked into his face.

He smiled. "I don't say I was; then my heart was hot within me, after that scene of last night—the poor young man who was crushed in the mill, telling me on his death-bed that he would have come to church oftener only there were so many smart folks there, and he could only edge in sideways, and scarcely hear what I was talking about." The great dark eyes, which had been looking straight before him during this

conversation, with a sort of resolute defiance in them, softened now, and a mist gathered over them, as he said, "But, I have missed the spirit of my Master, no doubt, too often—too often—pray for me, mother."

Then there was a gentle pressure of the hand, and the mother's eyes grew dim too. "Yes, Maurice, I do not fail there." And then, after a silence, she went on. "Thorns have already appeared amongst Millicent's flowers. Her stepmother is going to marry Mr. Roberts."

"Mr. Roberts, my dear mother!"

"Yes, even so, immediately; the poor child told me the news with a voice which was all but tearful."

"What does Sir Stephen say to this?"

"Very little, I suspect. Perhaps if he had said more Millicent would feel less uneasy about it. I do feel for her, poor child, for Ida at sixteen is young enough to catch the tone of the people she is thrown with, and those boys will be formed on the Roberts's model, I am afraid."

"Well, I do not see that Lady Legh has any right to object to the marriage of her stepmother. Worldly motives have doubtless influenced her; but who shall say that Millicent herself is guiltless in this matter?"

"I say so, Maurice. I believe Millicent's love for her husband is entirely free from all taint or touch of worldly policy or self-aggrandizement. I can only repeat for the hundredth time, that I think you judge her harshly, and I feel certain you will acknowledge it some day."

"Well, mother, I have not learned hard judgment from you. Now, let us have some twilight music." And he rose, and went to a small piano, where he played a number of hymns and chants, with the touch and manner of an amateur, but with much emphasis and feeling. Now and then Mrs. Howard's soft, low voice kept up an accompaniment of words; and so the evening passed peacefully to its close.

The May sunshine which had gladdened the return of the bride to her new home on the first evening of her arrival, seemed finally withdrawn. Sunday was wet, and Millicent's entreaties to be allowed to walk down the park for service in the morning were vain. In such a down-pour Sir Stephen resolutely forbade it, and the Sunday seemed rather long. Accustomed to walk in all weathers to her class in St. Mary's School-room, when she lived in Bridge Street, and to teach her little brothers at home, both of which habits she

had retained during her six months' residence at Sherstone, Millicent felt bereft of her wonted occupation.

After luncheon she had a pleasant reading with her husband, and then he relapsed into a sleepy silence, and she sat by the window, watching the rain dancing in the little pools on the terrace, and hanging in ever-changing drops from the boughs of the roses and clematis. Something between a sigh and a yawn at last roused Sir Stephen.

"Well, darling, is there any sign of a clearance?"

"None," said Millicent; "not the faintest glimmer."

"Come here!" were the next words, and Millicent sat down on a stool at Sir Stephen's feet, and looked up into his face. He caressed her hair, and stroked it back from her forehead.

"I am afraid this has been a long dull Sunday. If you wish to go to church this evening, we will have the carriage—we can dine early."

"Thank you," she said, brightening; "I *should* like to go. But do not let us have the carriage, I have heaps of waterproof things, that you provided me with, you know, in Paris. Let us walk."

"What can be the pleasure of such an expedition to church? No," he said, "we will have the brougham, and drive down the park." He put his hand on the bell as he spoke. "Dinner at half-past five," he said to the footman, "and the brougham must be round at half-past six. The service is at seven, now, I think," he added, turning to Millicent.

"Yes; that is, it always used to begin at seven after Ascension Day. It did seem a pity not to go to church on our first Sunday," she continued; "I had so looked forward to it. But it is very kind of you to go; only I could walk quite easily such a short distance."

"More than three-quarters of a mile; for we could not possibly go through the shubberies in this deluge. But, like you, I think we ought to present ourselves at St. Mary's once to-day."

"Yes," she said; and then, gathering courage, she went on. "You are quite decided, dearest, that you do not wish me to take the elder class of girls at the school now?"

"*Quite*," he replied.

"Would you let me have two or three here on Sundays, if I may not go to them, and may I go and see some of the poor people?"

"My dear child, there are so many others to

do these things now. While you were Millicent Gardiner it was all very right and nice, now let some unattached young ladies take your place."

Millicent said no more, but the thought haunted her for the rest of the day that her new life would not be the life she had pictured—spreading around the happiness that was hers; using her newly-acquired wealth for the good of others; busy and active, and helping Mr. Howard with the temporal relief that he needed for the poor. These had been her dreams, and Sir Stephen's words fell like a chill on her heart. Then she reproached herself with ingratitude; she would make *him* her first earthly thought; live to please him, and find her happiness in this. In time, perhaps, wider opportunities would be given her.

Many eyes were on Lady Legh as she walked up St. Mary's Church that evening. Her sweet face was familiar to that congregation, for it was mostly composed of the wives of lawyers, surgeons, and physicians, with their families, who wandered from the Dunsford churches, where high pews, and whitewash, and dullness prevailed, to seek the bright cheerful service in Sir Stephen Legh's Church, as St. Mary's was popularly called. This mixed and changing con-

gregation filled the little church to overflowing, and, unless more room were made for the inhabitants of Sidcote itself, complaints like that of the dying man to Mr. Howard were likely to continue, and with only too much foundation: "If I did come to church, I could hardly edge in sideways, and could scarcely hear what you were talking about."

Were not these words ringing in the clergyman's ears to-night, as he scanned the assembly with a keen searching glance, when he entered the door of the chancel in his cassock. For one moment he paused before going to the vestry, and his eyes fell on Millicent Legh. A poor but superior looking woman, respectably dressed in spite of poverty, was standing patiently in the aisle, close to Sir Stephen Legh's seat, her prayer book in her hand, her head bent. Though the evening was so wet, the free seats were filled, and those which were rented could not be occupied by strangers till the service had begun. Mr. Howard knew the woman who had lately come to live on the outskirts of the district, a widow with two or three children, trying to support herself by keeping a little shop, and taking in needlework from the Dunsford tradespeople.

The contrast between the bright fair-haired

bride,—seated by her husband, in all the pretty neatness of her well-chosen attire, which, except for the delicate and well-fitting gloves, and the plain but handsome studs which clasped the cuffs to her slender wrist, and the collar round her throat, was very much in colouring and style what she had worn in her maiden days,—and the meanly dressed woman whose thin shawl hung close to her shoulders heavy with rain, the contrast was great, and, in Mr. Howard's state of mind, pressed heavily. He advanced a step into the body of the church, in which Sir Stephen Legh's seat was the second from the chancel, and beckoning the poor woman to the one immediately in front, bade her sit there. Then before the self-important officious man, who had wrung from Sir Stephen the place of seat-keeper and general overlooker of the church, on the plea of old service in the family, could approach, the clergyman was gone.

"Move down, move down," this worthy official said, peremptorily waving his hand; and then, with a great rustling of silks, and general bustle, two ladies and a gentleman swept into the seat. One look told Lady Legh that these new comers were Mr. Roberts and his sister, who kept his house, and his eldest daughter, who was so soon to be the companion of her sister Ida.

The rosy flush, which was ever quick to rise in Millicent's cheek, deepened as the Robertses settled themselves; and this operation took some time! The hymn books were brushed from the ledge by the surging crinoline. Glances of surprise and dissatisfaction were directed towards the poor widow, who had retreated to the further end of the seat. Then there were smelling bottles to be laid on the book-shelf, whispered comments between the elder lady and the younger, while Mr. Roberts, sitting at the end of the seat, just in front of Sir Stephen, tried in vain to catch Lady Legh's attention. But her eyes were fixed upon her book, and very soon the organ sounded, and then Mr. Howard's voice began the prayers. He went through the entire service unassisted, and his manner was reverent and devout; there was a reality about it, and a power which was unmistakable, and no congregation could be quieter than the mixed one to which he ministered. His style of preaching was peculiar, rugged, and uncompromising, reminding his listeners of the days of old, when there were men found ready to preach what they believed, even though their words might be reported and bring upon them earthly loss, and contempt, it might be, death.

Mr. Howard dealt merciless blows on all worldliness, and self-seeking in his sermons. He would strike at the very root of vanity and foolish decoration of the person, or of the house, the following of custom for custom's sake, the fear of differing from prescribed rules of society and fashion, and to all this, and a great deal more, the self-seekers, the worldly, the vain and foolish slaves to fashion and custom would listen—were compelled to listen! For with no particular gift of eloquence, with no great grace of language or manner, Maurice Howard bore down upon the hearts of the people with the force and power which the man thoroughly in earnest, who means what he says, never fails to exercise.

This evening the strain was especially such as I have described, and an uncomfortable sense of being even such an one as the preacher pictured pressed on many and many a listener.

But suddenly his manner would change, and with his Lord's name upon his lips his tone and voice would soften, and he would speak of that great Love as the remedy and the refuge, and entreat those who heard him to be reconciled to God, by the one and only Way.

The words of his text to-night had been, "If any man love the world the love of the Father is

not in him." And great was the contrast which was drawn between the love of the world, and the man in whom was the love of the Father. A great and moving contrast, and the hearts of some were stirred within them. Millicent Legh gave one shy look at her husband, but his face displayed no sign of any emotion. His well-cut features were immoveable, and his steadfast eyes were apparently fixed on the chancel window, under which were inscribed the names of his kindred.

"Sweet Saviour, bless us ere we go,"

was sung before the congregation separated, and Millicent felt the concluding words of each verse to be the very longing of her soul—

"Through life's long day and death's dark night,
O gentle Jesus, be our light."

She was really unconscious of Mr. Roberts's efforts to bow to her as he marshalled his sister and daughter from their seat. Quite unconscious, too, of the many curious glances and half doubtful recognitions which awaited her as she went down the aisle. So, while hard judgments were passed on her by some, and she was thought proud and elevated, and,

set up with her new honours, as Miss Roberts boldly asserted—perhaps no heart among her judges was as humble, and carried away from self and selfish thoughts as Lady Legh's that evening!

When they were in the brougham again Millicent put her hand into her husband's, "It is so nice to be in St. Mary's Church once more," she said. "I have heard no one like Mr. Howard since we went away last September. Oh, how glad you must be to have put him there in your own church, Stephen!"

"Little enthusiast!" was the answer. "Yes, I am glad to have Maurice Howard where he is, though I sometimes think a softer and more malleable man would have suited the position better; still he is made of the right material, and though he carries plain speaking to the utmost bounds of propriety, I do not believe anyone appreciates his honesty of word and deed more than I do."

"I often have thought, Stephen, in old days, before this came—"

"What came?" he interposed.

"Before you loved me," she went on, with a pretty timid glance at him. "I have often thought how happy you must be to have built and

endowed St. Mary's, and provide for the needs of Sidcote by a man like Mr. Howard. It made me sigh that I could do nothing great or worthy, and I am inclined to sigh still when I think of it."

"Well, you are a part of myself, now!" he said, drawing her close, "so my good deeds are yours, you know. How the deodaras have grown since last year," he continued, leaning forward to look at a group of those graceful trees which skirted the slope of the lawn; "and how refreshed everything looks by the rain, 'fine growing rain,' as Davis would say."

A sudden breaking off from any serious subject was not uncommon, Millicent felt, with Sir Stephen.

It was impossible to imagine a more whole-hearted devotion then her's for her husband, and she invested him with an unattainable perfection, which had already experienced some slight shocks. She had beheld him from afar—grave, cold, and almost stern in manner and bearing; and she had seen in him the benefactor of Sidcote, the perfect ideal of what a Christian and a gentleman should be. When all coldness and stiffness vanished in his manner, when love, real and true, disinterested and unselfish was offered

her with almost passionate earnestness, as she responded to it, it was with a feeling that she was utterly unworthy of the honour he did her by taking her to his heart. So wholly true, guileless, and simple was Millicent's nature (and there are yet left many women like her, thank God), that it is not too much to say, that having Sir Stephen for her own, comprised everything.

The change in position, manner of life, and the transition from comparative poverty to affluence, were nothing in themselves. The song of her heart was a glad and rejoicing song, and the burden was ever the same, that Sir Stephen Legh loved her for herself, and thought her worthy to be henceforward his helper in all great and noble schemes for the good of others and the glory of God. And yet Sir Stephen Legh was not in many things what Millicent believed. His religion was, so to speak, the religion of circumstances. Brought up carefully and tenderly by a mother who, early widowed, proved a Monica indeed to her two sons. Naturally averse to anything gay or frivolous, Sir Stephen had never given his mother any uneasiness; the merry, laughing Randolph, who, after escaping death in the heat of battle again and again, was drowned in the depths of a sunny sea, almost

in sight of his ancestral home—the bold, brave, unselfish Randolph had often caused his mother anxiety, but Stephen never. The young baronet passed from Eton to Oxford, and from Oxford to take the head of his house, calm, self-contained, and passionless. He read a great deal, devoted himself to the improvement of his estate, spent hours in designing plans for this end with his bailiff and steward, but never shewed any inclination for things which so many in his position, and with his means at their disposal, would have freely indulged in. He was ready to show all the hospitality befitting his station, and the very year when the accident happened, which left him the sole representative of his family, he had taken a house in London for three months, that his young sister's longing to see a little of the world might be gratified. He had enjoyed a cruise in his yacht before that time, but afterwards the Nautilus was sold, and Sir Stephen never went to sea again. A quiet shooting party in his own grounds was all the out-door recreation which he cared for now, and absences abroad after his mother's death had not been unfrequent.

In finishing the church she had begun; in sparing no pains or expense, that it should be a model in every way; in appointing the son of an

early friend of his father's to fill the cure; in providing moderately for the endowment, and acceding to Mr. Howard's urgent appeal for a school-house and a salaried master and mistress, Sir Stephen had acted from the conscientious motive of fulfilling his mother's wishes to the letter. But the deep well-spring of action, which Millicent attributed to him so fondly, was not there.

Having done all this, he was content to leave it in Mr. Howard's hands. He preferred having no discussion on matters connected with the church, and the idea of enlarging it already, as Mr. Howard suggested, was in his eyes quite unnecessary. If Mr. Howard attracted the people from Dunsford, and they would persist in driving to St. Mary's instead of attending their own parish church, he did not see that the difficulty of accommodating them, and the increasing number of poor which Mr. Roberts's increasing mills employed, rested with him to meet; and the zeal and energy which Mr. Howard showed, only drove Sir Stephen into greater apparent coldness. It did not suit him to build the transepts now, nor did it suit him to head a subscription list with his name. If they were built at all, it would be when he chose, and at his sole

expense; and, meantime, if Mr. Howard were uneasy and dissatisfied, resignation of the living was open to him.

In the conversations like that which Mrs. Howard mentioned to her son, between him and Sir Stephen, there was often a want of gentleness and forbearance on both sides; but Sir Stephen always came out with the best of the question. He had so many interests and possessions, and St. Mary's was but *one* amongst them, while to Mr. Howard it was the one great object of life to perform every tittle of his duty as a Christian minister, to spend and be spent, and to seek every opportunity in which to do this; so that while one talked coolly and decidedly, with the self-reliance of a man who knew that power rested with him, the other grew fervent and excited, and perhaps forgot what substantial good Sir Stephen had really effected, and chafed against his unconcern on subjects which lay close to his own heart. Undoubtedly he did, as Sir Stephen said, carry plain speaking to the very bounds of propriety, and sometimes forgot to speak the truth with the love and tenderness of his Master. But he bore about with him the great secret of influence—he *was* what he seemed to be. If he preached against worldly luxury,

he eschewed it for himself. The things which tended to his mother's comfort in her invalid life, were the only things on which he ever spent money for his own gratification. The people felt that a man of scarcely thirty, who laboured all the week amongst them; who ministered to them in the church with unflagging earnestness and devotion; who gave of his bread to the hungry, and never turned his face from any poor man, must be *true* —true of heart; and consequently admonition, which would have been resented from a clergyman who lived in style himself, and shrank from bodily fatigue or inconvenience, was received in good part from Maurice Howard, whose deeds of self-forgetfulness and charity were spoken of on all sides.

"It's not to us poor folks he shows pride, or is hard and severe like. It isn't his will that we are pushed out of church by the gentry flocking in. It's odd they should be so fond of listening to him, when he just hits right and left at them; but then, he doesn't leave us alone, neither."

This opinion was part of a conversation which was carried on beneath a large cotton umbrella, held with a firm uncompromising grasp over the shabby black shawl of the poor widow, whose pre-

sence had been so distasteful to Miss Roberts that evening at church. The speaker was a big stalwart woman, far better dressed than her companion, and showing, from the crown of her substantial straw bonnet to the soles of her thick boots, that she was well to do in the world. "Now, look here, Mrs. Hayden," she said, as the pair wound up the lane, on either side of which stood rows of small red brick cottages, "Don't you go again to church with that poor shattery alpaca thing, which was quite soaked through before you had gone a dozen steps. I am stout and hearty, and my umbrella is like myself, good for service; you are welcome to share it, and I only hope you won't get the rheumatics, sitting in your drenched clothes as you did."

"I thank you very much, Miss Strong," was the reply. "I feel it very kind and neighbourly of you. No, I won't come in; I can soon run home these few steps, and I am anxious to get back to the children. Herbert will be wearying for me as it is."

"Poor fellow! how is he? You should try rubbing black snails upon his weak legs; you should, indeed, Mrs. Hayden, if you would be ruled by me now."

But the rain drove one woman within the

shelter of her comfortable home, and the other towards the end house of the same row, which had an entrance at the side as well as one in front. This was closed to-day, as it led into the shop, but the other was quickly opened at the sound of the mother's footsteps, and a joyful voice greeted her.

"Oh, mother! aren't you very wet?" While from within her name was spoken in less happy tones, "Mother!"

"Yes, my dear Herbert, yes; I am only giving Susie my wet shawl; not that I am very wet now, for Miss Strong sheltered me so nicely all the way. How are you, dear?" she continued, as she entered the small room, where a boy lay outstretched on a little couch. "How are you, my dear?"

"Oh, tired, that's all! Baby has been crying himself hoarse, but Susie has got him to sleep now. Mother," the boy asked eagerly, "Did you see her—Miss Gardiner—at church?"

"Yes, dear. Lady Legh you must call her now. I sat close to her."

"Did she know you, mother; did she speak to you?"

"No, dear, no; it was not likely in church; besides, remember how my dress is altered, and

how I am altered too. Lady Legh will inquire for us some day, perhaps, and a sad tale enough she will hear."

"How did she look, mother?"

"Much the same—pretty and winsome as ever, and as good—not that I looked at her more than to give a glance, you know."

"Will she ever come and see me, I wonder?" sighed the sick boy; "and look at my drawings, and bring me books as she used to do, with her little brothers. I daresay not; she is a grand lady now, and will forget me." And the poor invalid turned wearily, and gazed out, with wistful eyes, upon the woods of Sidcote Park, standing in quiet motionless masses against the leaden sky. "Oh, mother!" he went on, "pray tell Mr. Howard to let her know of father's death, and how poor we are now, and—" The child's voice failed. He was but twelve years old, and the change in his life—from the plenty of what was believed a thriving tradesman's home in Dunsford, to a poor cottage in Sidcote, where his mother worked for a scanty pittance was great indeed. His father had died in a state of hopeless bankruptcy, and the fever which cut him down in a few days, left no time for repentance or amendment. Many in a humbler condition of life than himself suffered

from his insolvency; and this thought pressed upon him on his dying bed, and he left it behind him to be a burden to his gentle uncomplaining widow. She refused to keep back anything of her worldly possessions; all was sold that was convertible into money, and the demands of the creditors were satisfied as far as they could be. If ever God prospered her again, Mrs. Hayden thought she would give up her savings to pay the full amount of her husband's debts. But, with three children to provide for—one a mere infant, and the eldest a cripple—that day seemed far off indeed; "straight-laced, absurd notions," her husband's brother—who came to settle his affairs—called them: "It's all fair and just, and if you have paid the dividend, what more need you trouble yourself about?" But Mrs. Hayden's principles were fixed by a sheet anchor, which many did not understand—her ideas of justice and right were drawn from the source and spring of both,—and though the poor widow and children of that unfortunate man, Hayden, the corn and provision dealer, vanished from the sight and the thoughts of the Dunsford people, One eye was upon her for good, and a strong Arm supported her through the deep waters of poverty and widowhood. Her bright-eyed little daughter, Susie,

and her fat, rosy baby were the comfort of her life, as far as earth was concerned. But Herbert, her poor, pining, invalid child, who was so keenly alive to the change in his position—who felt all the privations consequent on it—he who was old enough to feel the disgrace and the trial to its full extent—for him his mother's heart often ached. Millicent Gardiner, attracted by his pale face, as he was drawn along in a chair through Bridge Street, had made acquaintance with Herbert three years ago. She had been constant in her efforts to enliven him, by encouraging his talent for drawing, lending him books, and going to read to him, sometimes taking her brothers, sometimes her sister with her. But now, Herbert bitterly thought, she had forgotten him—would never find him out in the Mill Lane —would never think of him again. And thus poor Herbert added another to the list of those who entirely misjudged Millicent Legh.

CHAPTER III.

THE VICAR'S MOTHER.

"She had heaven's sweetest gift of sympathy,
That nameless love which lays a cooling hand
Upon the sufferer's brow,
And charms him from himself with gentleness."

From "PANSIES."

A FEW days after the rainy Sunday, when Sir Stephen retreated to his study after breakfast, Millicent ran upstairs for her hat, and prepared for a walk. Her spirits rose with the fresh sweet air, ten times sweeter and fresher for the rain, and armed with scissors and basket, she made her way to the garden, singing to herself in a low tone as she cut here a spray of rose, and there a white narcissus, and arranged the colours of many a fragrant blossom with fern leaves, and ivy. Then she took the short path through the shrubbery towards the lodge, and pausing at the gate, spoke a few kind words to the old woman,

who had lived there for more years than she could count. Then on again, just outside the lodge-gate, and turning in at another, she was at the vicarage. The neat maid servant smiled a good morning, and opened the door of the drawing-room, with the familiar words, "Miss Gardiner," almost trembling on her lips.

"So early, and so welcome," was Lady Legh's greeting from Mrs. Howard, as she stretched out her arms towards her with one of those radiant smiles, which was like a gleam of sunshine, so full was it of warmth and brightness. The life of the invalid, when it is made beautiful by the patience and comfort wherewith God can sweeten the cup which He giveth his children to drink, is the most beautiful that can be seen in this world. Such examples are rare, for so many of us faint and fail under bodily chastisement; so many of us can only bear feebly onwards beneath the cross of weakness, of suffering, and, what is harder than all to some natures, of inaction. Twenty years ago, when Mrs. Howard was laid prostrate by an injury to her spine, and heard the verdict of the doctors, that she would never have the use of her lower limbs again, the blow had fallen heavily. She was then in the full prime of her womanhood, with her son's energy

of character, and quick ardent feelings, but after the hidden struggle of a few weeks, the cloud passed away from her unselfish spirit, and looked out upon her husband, who was many years older than herself, upon their only child, Maurice, with a sweetness and gladdening influence, perhaps, unknown before. With a singularly clear and active mind, Mrs. Howard managed to keep up all interests with the outer world; she read and she wrote, she sympathized with the sorrowful, and she rejoiced with the glad. Few knew, and none will, perhaps, ever know, how far the lovely influence of that chastened spirit extended. Few knew, and none, perhaps, guessed how often pain and sleepless nights were her portion, when entering that room, they saw her lying with a smile upon her face in her accustomed place; all her books and little pictures arranged about her, and the signs of invalid industry on every side. Needlework on one table, of a kind which told its own tale, that sort of Dorcas work which no sewing machine will, we hope, ever quite make needless, with bits, too, of delicate knitting, or fairy-like embroidery. On another table were her writing materials, and a little reading-stand carved in oak, and her books, changed constantly by Maurice's

hand; the Bible and Prayer-book keeping their place close to their mistress' side, and with them two or three well-worn volumes of devotion and poetry.

"You have had a bad night," Millicent said, as she bent to kiss Mrs. Howard.

"Not very good," was the reply; "but bad nights in summer have their advantages; it is so pleasant to see the dawn break over the Sidcote Woods. Flowers! how lovely! Look, there is Maurice's last extravagance, that carved bracket, and the little white vase. Will you put the flowers there?" Millicent obeyed, and went to the chiffonier, where water always stood, to fill the vase, and then arranged the flowers with great taste, Mrs. Howard watching her. "My dear, I forget you are not Millicent Gardiner, still. I find it hard to believe in the change."

"Just as if the name could change me. 'Me myself,' as poor Georgie says."

"'A rose by any name'—you know the rest," Mrs. Howard said, archly; "but come, sit down on Maurice's chair, and talk."

"Yes, that is what I want; it has been a great whirl since Sunday, and I am glad to tell you about it—such crowds of visitors, great and small, every afternoon from luncheon till five

o'clock. I thought two days would have exhausted them, but yesterday, Wednesday, was the worst. There were so many, and the Robertses amongst them, and"—Millicent paused—"and Mr. Howard."

"Maurice told me he found you encompassed with Robertses, and Fergusons, and Savilles."

"Yes, it was a most trying combination. The very thought of it makes me blush now."

"Mr. Roberts took the initiative, I suppose."

"Oh, yes! Claimed future relationship; compared the size of the drawing-room to his own at Bella Vista; asked Sir Stephen if he had noticed the 'bays,' he had just bought them of Lord Senhouse, who was a capital fellow, no doubt Sir Stephen knew him, and—it is no use going into details, it was one incessant boast from beginning to end. Poor mamma's name dragged in occasionally, and Miss Roberts assuring me her comfort would be the first thought henceforth at Bella Vista, while Julia was delighted to have Ida for a sister. Was it not trying?—and perhaps it was worse when they played off under-bred airs on the poor Fergusons, and patronized the Savilles who are of course, their superiors in everything but money; and I

felt it so, because I have brought it on Sir Stephen, and he will not speak of it, nor say it is disagreeable, but treats it with a cool and quiet indifference, which I cannot feel. Are you laughing at me?"

"No, not at you; only at the picture you give me of your discomfort. I can so well imagine it and sympathize too, to a certain extent. But after all, there must be little bitter pools in the stream of all earthly pleasure and joy."

"I know that, and I don't wish to magnify this grievance, you know it is not pride exactly, for if my mother had connected my brothers and sister with the poorest people, who were refined and well-bred, I am quite sure I should only have been thankful that she and they should have a guardian and friend. But this is the very last thing I dreamed of as likely, just as it is the very one which will be an annoyance to Sir Stephen."

"Had you any fore-warning of it before you left Dunsford last September?" Mrs. Howard asked.

"No! at least none that struck me at the time, though now several little things occur to me as signs which I did not see. But, Mrs.

Howard, there is something else I had to speak of. In my letters to you, when I knew I was coming to Sidcote, I told you of my anticipated pleasures, in doing what I could in Mr. Howard's school amongst the poor, and helping him in any way; but I had to tell him yesterday what Sir Stephen said, that he did not wish me to tie myself to anything of the kind, and so I must not go against his will in this."

"Most certainly not," was Mrs. Howard's reply.

Then Millicent went on.

"I cannot help feeling that Mr. Howard misjudges me; that he thinks I am too willing to give up the point, to lapse into an easy-going luxurious life. I read it in his manner yesterday so plainly, and I cannot help being sorry."

Too truthful to contradict what was so literally the fact, Mrs. Howard only said,

"Dear Millicent, I do not misjudge you. I advise you to wait your time, and find out the many useful things you may do without actual tangible service, such as that you long for. In your present position, a visit to those who are not poor, the lending of books, the gift of flowers, the kindly interest in the concerns of those who are less blessed by worldly prosperity

than you are, opens before you a wide field. The over-worked little wife of the curate of St. Margaret's, for instance, who, with her troop of little children and her home cares, must want brightening in that dull house in Church Court."

"Oh, but," said Millicent eagerly, "Mrs. Howard, I am so afraid of seeming to be obtrusive, to be thought patronizing, when I am only sympathizing."

"My dear, I think you have too much natural refinement ever to patronize."

"I am glad you say that; it would be so hateful in me, especially; and as I have suffered from it myself in old times, I could not inflict it on other people."

Then Mrs. Howard went on—

"If we have a single-hearted desire to do good, hoping for nothing again, and to show to all men that we are not ashamed of the badge we wear, we bear about a great panoply with us, which is impervious to the shafts of envy and folly. If we *are* what we *seem*, we must carry some influence with us. There will be a harvest some day, though through the earthly mists and shadows we fail to see the springing up of that which shall at last bear fruit. You are very

young, dear Millicent; don't be impatient, but wait God's time."

"Thank you for speaking so to me; you always do me good. I hope I may still keep some influence over Ida. I do long to do that."

"Yes, and who can say but it may tell too upon Julia Roberts, and through her on her brother."

"Poor Miss Roberts! it is not her fault that she is dressed up at seventeen in all the finery that can be gathered together. I should have more hope if the aunt were going to take her departure from Bella Vista, but I fear she is settled there."

A step in the garden outside, Mr. Howard's step, made Lady Legh spring up.

"I must go now," she said; "Florence and Henry are coming this afternoon, and I want to go to the station to meet them, and to escape the fourth day of visitors. You know they were to have been here on Monday, but little Stephen had a cold, and was cutting a tooth, his mother said, so they delayed their journey for a few days."

"Mrs. Legh, like you, will be coming to old haunts here," said Mrs. Howard. And then she stopped, for Maurice came into the room. Milli-

cent was just leaving it, and there was something of an exaggeration of stiffness in the way in which he held the door for her to pass, and went with her into the hall.

"Lady Legh," he said, "I saw an old friend of yours this morning, who is very anxious to see you: little Herbert Hayden, the lame child."

"Oh, yes!" said Millicent, brightening, "the son of the corn dealer in Union Street. I will stop there — that is if I can — when I drive through the town to the station this afternoon."

"You will not find him in Union Street now; his father died in January, of fever—died a bankrupt, and had, dishonourably I fear, gone on for several years on credit, which he knew was misplaced, as far as he was concerned. Many suffered from his insolvency, and his poor widow —she sat before you in church on Sunday night— has removed to a cottage in Mill Lane, where she has opened a little shop for the hands employed in the cloth mills, and supports herself and her three children as best she can. They are in this district now, and I promised the child that I would mention him to you. He says you first spoke to him in Bridge Street in his chair, and then went to visit him in his home—a palace when compared to their present abode."

"Are they, indeed, so very poor? I can scarcely realize it."

"It is too true; Mrs. Hayden insisted on selling everything to defray the debts, as far as she could, and giving up her own small inheritance also—two or three hundred pounds settled on her at her marriage, and, by law, not available for her husband's creditors."

"How noble of her! I will try to see them very soon. Good-bye." She extended her hand, and Mr. Howard took it; but the pressure was not a very cordial one, and left a chill behind. Half way up the park—for she chose the avenue this time—Lady Legh met her husband, and the meeting was as joyful as if they had been parted for a week.

"I thought you were going to be buried with Mr. Davis till luncheon," she said. "It is so nice to meet you when I did not expect it."

"And where have you been, little runaway? I have been looking for you everywhere."

"Have you?" she asked anxiously. "I went to the vicarage with some flowers, and to talk to Mrs. Howard. Oh, isn't it a beautiful day!" she went on, "don't you like to look up at the sky through the branches of the dear old elms, as they bend over to kiss one another from each

side of the avenue, and the sunshine peeps in and out between the leaves, and the sky looks so blue."

It was very like the joyous admiration of a child, and Sir Stephen laughed. "Yes, this is a fine old avenue," he said. "One of my earliest recollections is of a race down here on our white ponies; Randolph, though so much younger, riding better than I did—when he was only nine, and I thirteen. It reminds me, you must have a horse, Millicent, and learn to ride. I must look out for one."

"Thank you, so much. I think I shall go down in the open carriage to meet Florence this afternoon. I shall like the drive, and I do hope I shall miss the callers too."

"I have promised to ride with Davis, to see some mowing machine about which he is eager. It belongs to that 'capital fellow, Lord Senhouse.'"

"Oh! Stephen—" and then Millicent's dismayed tone changed into a laugh, for her husband's eyes, as she met them, twinkled with amusement.

"Poor Mr. Roberts," he said. "Have you written to Mrs. Gardiner about the wedding."

"Yes; I said we were only just come home, and could not, you thought, leave it again so

soon. Poor mamma, I tried to say it as pleasantly as I could. I am sure she *will* feel things sometimes to be very uncongenial, for she is of a different stamp herself. I dread the whole thing most for Ida. I should not like to see her a repetition of Miss Julia Roberts."

Sir Stephen said no more; but presently gave his unmistakable sign of not wishing to continue the subject, by making a remark about something entirely removed from it.

"May I order the carriage directly after lunch, and drive on the Seaforth road, if I am too early to go to the station?" Millicent asked, as they reached the house.

"May I? Of course, if you won't be tired," was the reply; "the spring cart must go for the luggage. Florence is very much altered if she has not brought a dozen big boxes, as well as herself."

"And then there will be the baby too, and the nurse, and a maid. You have not forgotten the baby?"

"Oh, no. Does Mrs. Bligh know where to put them?"

"Yes; she showed me the rooms this morning. She seems rather pleased to prepare them for your godson."

"Ah, to be sure," Sir Stephen said, with the

air of one who was reminded of what he had forgotten, "the child must be a year and a half old by this time. Stephen Legh Legh is his style and title, I think?"

The carriage was punctual, and so was Millicent, who was soon seated in it, and driving down the park, with a triumphant sense of liberty and freedom from the over-powering stream of callers which was sure to set in by three o'clock. After several turns up the Seaforth road, and several pauses at the station, the bell was heard, and the train glided up to the platform. The footman disappeared within two swinging doors, and returned presently, his hands encumbered with a variety of small parcels, and followed by a lady, a nurse, and a baby, and another servant; while a huge pile of luggage brought up the rear, attended by a small, fair man, with long, light moustache and beard, who was slow and deliberate in his movements, and who formed a striking contrast in manner and in person to his wife.

"How do you do, dearest Millicent?" said a low, deep-toned voice. "Now, are we all to come in here? Take care, nurse, how you manage with baby. Sarah had better go with the luggage. Henry, do get in — quick!" and then Mrs. Legh fell back in her seat with the bearing of a

person completely at home, and, pressing Millicent's hand, said, again and again, how charmed she was to see her.

Mr. Legh was the last to enter the carriage; he did not hurry himself then, or upon any other occasion, and it was wonderful that his wife ever thought of suggesting to him the possibility that he might be quicker in his movements.

"Henry, you knew Lady Legh?" said Mrs. Legh half-reprovingly.

"Oh, yes! I remember you very well," he replied, extending his hand. "How is Stephen?"

"Did you see the luggage was right, Henry —thirteen packages in all? When one travels without proper servants," she went on, turning to Millicent, "it is such a bore to have to look after the boxes and bags. What do you think of baby, Millicent?"

This was a puzzling question; the prominent thought in anyone's mind on first beholding little Stephen, was, naturally, that he was very small, very puny, very fair, and very grandly dressed. The dress was in good taste, no doubt, for Mrs. Legh never absolutely offended against the rule of appropriate appearance. But still the baby looked too small for the canopy of feathers and

ribbon, and the embroidery of the pelisse looked suited to a larger child.

"I should think he was very like Mr. Legh," was all Millicent could find to say. Evidently a doubtful compliment in his mother's opinion, who said, "A great many people think him far more like my family, sweet little mannikin."

"How familiar this all looks," she said, leaning forward, as they drove through the High Street of Dunsford. "It is a dear dull old place, and I suppose all the people—the Senhouses, and the Brookes, and half a dozen more—are in London now, like everyone else who has money enough. You'll be having *your* house there next year, Millicent, you enviable creature."

"I have not got on as far as next year yet," was the reply. "Stephen and I were three weeks in town before we came home. It was amusing to drive in the parks, and I liked seeing the sights, as children say; but I should soon get tired of London, I am only too glad to be here."

"Ah! you will tell a different tale some day, when you have tasted the sweets of life there. Surely that is not Mr. Howard? how aged and altered he looks. He does not see us, he is in the clouds as usual, I suppose."

The slightest possible hesitation and change

in her voice would have struck even Millicent at any other time; but she was going over in her own mind, whether Florence were really the charming person she was reputed to be, or whether she dissented in her heart from this opinion, though she could give no reason for it, nor have told anyone what it was that jarred so much upon her.

Mr. Legh leaned back with an air of dreamy indifference; the baby kindly went off to sleep, the nurse disengaged one hand, and settled his cape and ribbons, while Mrs. Legh continued a strain of light easy talk, which never ceased till the carriage stopped at the door of the house.

Sir Stephen met them, his whip in his hand, for he had just got off his horse, and his wife's eyes brightened as she saw him. He gave his guests a kindly welcome, and kissed his godson on the forehead, with becoming acknowledgment of the tie between them; rallied Mrs. Legh on her evident pride in her son, and told her husband he must contrive to look a little older to suit his paternal dignity.

"Now, Millicent, tell me all about it," was Mrs. Legh's request, when they were alone together in the drawing-room that evening. "You know

I am longing to hear. You and I," she added, "must be like sisters now."

They certainly did not look like sisters, the contrast between them was so marked. Mrs. Legh was dressed in black, with the relief of scarlet ribbon scattered here and there. She was short, and her figure was not good when standing, but she had fine sloping shoulders, and the graceful fall of these, and the way her head was set upon them, was her great beauty. Her face was far from actually pretty, the lower part decidedly plain, and the features irregular. But her complexion was good, and her hair and eyebrows of that peculiar golden brown, which just takes here and there a blush of red upon it, and which artists love to make their study. Her forehead was low but wide, and there was altogether an expression of power about her, but not of refinement. She had a certain dash and air which bordered on that most unwomanly type of women, now classed as "fast;" but nevertheless she managed to keep within a prescribed boundary, and the most fastidious when called upon to define wherein Mrs. Legh did not please them, were, like Millicent, puzzled, and felt that they had no direct charge to make. That her marriage with Mr. Legh had a prospective aim, there were some who were kind enough

to declare; while her defenders, and they were many, would laugh at the idea. Sir Stephen, in his prime at two-and-forty, was likely to marry any day, and if Florence had really wished for the position, now occupied by Millicent, scheming to marry Mr. Legh, was not the surest road to secure it. Possibly she had known her guardian too well, ever to dream or think of marrying him. Florence was only happy when she ruled, and Sir Stephen was the last man who would yield to any dictation whatever. In the long visits at Sidcote, which, after her mother's death, Sir Stephen did not fail to leave at Mrs. Mason's and his ward's disposal, Florence had had ample opportunity of knowing her guardian. He had undertaken to look after her pecuniary interests from the time she lost her father till she came of age, to oblige one whom he had known well in early life, and whose death, which resulted from a fall from his horse when shooting with Sir Stephen, was another of the many sad events which had left their trace on him, though outwardly, he showed no sign that such was the case. On the day Florence Mason came of age, Sir Stephen made her a full and particular statement of the money in the banker's hands, of the way in which she would derive the small amount

of interest, and the manner in which several small sums had been carefully invested. It was all done in a business-like, straight-forward manner, and five years later, equally business-like, was his reception of his ward's announcement that she was going to marry his first cousin, and only remaining relative, Henry Legh.

"Henry is not a man to make any way in the world," Sir Stephen had said. "Have you considered this, Florence?"

"Oh, yes! but I have never been used to riches, and that makes all the difference."

"Henry has three hundred a year, and you have two, now, and you will have two more when your mother dies. Will that satisfy you, do you think?"

"Yes, dearest guardian," was the answer. "I am quite the person to make one pound go as far as some people make ten. Then Henry may be called to the bar any day, you know."

Sir Stephen shrugged his shoulders. "May — yes—but briefs don't drop from the clouds, and the early career of even a clever barrister is generally all uphill. I should have thought, Florence, there would have been many people more suited to you than Henry, who though a

good fellow, is certainly somewhat too deliberate and dreamy."

"Perhaps he is, dear Sir Stephen, but I think I have spirit enough for both; and he loves me, he says, and will never scold me or sermonize me, you know; so I have quite decided."

This was said with no hesitation or blushing. Florence was then six-and-twenty, and was reasonably supposed to have arrived at years of discretion; so the deed was done, and it answered just as well as she had predicted.

Mr. Legh was indulgent, quiet, and intensely proud of his wife. The call to the bar had come, and a maiden brief had been in his hands. At present, a shower of them had certainly not dropped from the clouds. But Florence liked going with her husband on circuit, and having been accustomed from childhood to a migratory watering-place life with her mother, it suited her well enough to follow the same now; and she more frequently accompanied Mr. Legh than stayed at home, in her tiny house at Kensington, where she had managed to gather around her many of the elegancies of life, and to prove the truth of her own assertion, that she was clever in making one pound go as

far as ten. Such were the outlines of Florence Legh's character, to which may be added, the few words which have infinite pathos in them, especially when applied to a woman. She loved this present world; she loved it; she lived for it. That other world was a thing apart from her daily thoughts; that other world, to which we are all hastening, in which we may find ourselves at any moment. And yet—contradictory as it seems to write it, and perplexing as are the living examples which must show every one who reads what is written here, that similar instances abound in these days — Florence believed herself to be religious in her own acceptation of the word. She was in a state of wild excitement at a ball. As far as her means allowed, she would catch at any chance of a dinner or a dance; but she was also loud in her defence of all ultra views in Church matters and professed herself to have the greatest sympathy with sisterhoods and monastic life,—with excessive ornaments in churches, and with excessive ritualism too. She was angry with those who differed from her, intolerant of contradiction, one of those who do such infinite harm, by provoking just indignation, which is so well expressed by the words

of the inspired King himself. "Why dost thou preach my laws, and takest my covenant into thy mouth, whereas thou hatest to be reformed, and hath cast my words behind thee? Consider this, ye that forget God; for whoso offereth me thanks and praise, he honoureth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation right, will I show the salvation of God."

Millicent Legh's natural characteristics were different, indeed, from those of her guest. She was so womanly, so tender, and so true; and self-renunciation and forgetfulness had been easy to her, even in the days before the great principle of the Cross had become the mainspring of every action. She was refined and sensitive, loving and gentle; but she bore about with her a certain dignity and reticence, which had been her safeguard many a time, and kept her from the intrusion of vulgar minds. She was not accomplished or shining in any way, but her intellectual powers were well cultivated; and she was really far in advance of many a young lady who had gone through a vast amount of educational routine, and could boast of having been under as many masters for languages, music, and the whole tribe of the "ologies" as there are days in the year!

Retiring, though without any shadow of gaucherie or false shyness, Lady Legh reminded one of the lily under its canopy of cool refreshing green, the flower which all are glad to stoop and gather with gentle hand, and look upon year by year as the emblem of purity and innocence.

This evening, as Mrs. Legh made herself comfortable on a sofa, in very much the position of Winterhalter's picture of the Empress Eugenie. Millicent took her work from a little basket, and seated herself on a low chair by the open window.

"Now, I expect you to talk and tell me everything," Mrs. Legh repeated. "Do you know how the whole world was taken by surprise at Sir Stephen's long-expected wife turning out to be Millicent Gardiner."

"Some people like surprises and wonders," was the quiet answer, "so I am glad that such have been gratified."

"But, my dear Millicent, you look so young and childlike still, you might be Sir Stephen's daughter. I think you ought to dress a little more now, just to make the difference in age less perceptible; that white muslin and blue ribbons, for instance, were very fit for you a year

ago, but now you ought to have some waving, shining silk, or something of that kind."

Lady Legh turned her soft eyes full upon Florence, and with a touch of the dignity I have described, said, "If I please Sir Stephen in my dress, and if I like muslin better than silk, I suppose I may wear it."

"Of course, dearest, but I wanted to tell you that, not long ago, at Mr. Justice Harrison's, we met a relation of yours. Your own mother's name was Vere, was it not?"

"Yes; but I have never heard anything of her family; indeed I doubt whether there are any alive now who knew her: certainly none who have shown interest in me."

"Ah! but you see, dearest, the tables will turn now; this Mr. Vere was most anxious to hear all about you. He is a charming person—writes in magazines, the first-class ones, you know: and is well up in every subject. Someone at dinner was talking about Sir Stephen's marriage, and that you were a daughter of a Colonel Gardiner, when Mr. Vere was interested directly and said you were his cousin, he believed, and he must look you up. I think you should respond to an overture when he makes it; and ask him to come to Sidcote. I assure you when he asked

me what you were like, I drew for him the most bewitching picture. Mind, now, you realize it when you see him."

Millicent struggled with her vexation, and inwardly she thought Florence very disagreeable; but she answered quickly:—"When this Mr. Vere does me the honour to 'look me up,' I hope I shall show a due sense of it."

"You are certain to like him," Mrs. Legh continued. "He is so clever; he is already Queen's counsel; and will be a judge, Henry says. But this is a very provoking and stupid thing of Mrs. Gardiner to do, just now. I do feel so sorry for you about it. That dreadfully forward, vulgar man is sure to be a nuisance."

"Please I don't care to discuss that subject," Lady Legh said, with heightened colour; "nothing I say, can make it better, or prevent what is inevitable."

Gentle as Millicent's voice was, the tone was decided, and Mrs. Legh said no more about what was evidently so distasteful; but branched off in another direction, keeping up a ceaseless flow of small talk, till Sir Stephen came into the drawing-room.

Then Florence turned her attention to him, and inquired where her husband was.

"Gone to smoke a cigar on the terrace," was the information, shortly and concisely given.

"A bad habit, of which I try in vain to cure Henry," was the rejoinder. And then the three sat in the deepening twilight till the lamps were lighted, and tea brought in. Millicent, ashamed to be already wondering how long their guests would stay at Sidcote. Sir Stephen, abruptly turning over the pages of the "Quarterly Review," and assenting or replying when a reply was needed to what Mrs. Legh was saying; while every now and then his eyes dwelt tenderly on the slight outline of the graceful figure between him and the open window, through which all the sweet scents and sounds of the summer were borne on the evening breeze.

CHAPTER IV.

BELLA VISTA.

"I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano,
A stage, where every man must play a part."
"MERCHANT OF VENICE."

Two days after that on which Mrs. Gardiner had become Mrs. Roberts, Lady Legh found herself in the drawing-room at Bella Vista, waiting for Miss Gardiner, for whom she had inquired when giving her name to the servant. The Roberts's call had been returned, when she was on a round with Sir Stephen, a fortnight before, but the welcome words of "not at home" had then relieved her from getting out of the carriage. This morning, her visit was made to her sister, before luncheon; an expression of affectionate interest in that little Ida, whose life has been bound up with her own in the routine of home for sixteen years. The waiting time seemed long before Ida made her appearance, and Lady Legh had ample oppor-

tunity to learn by heart the details of the drawing-room. It was very large, very wide, and very full of heavy furniture. A blaze of yellow damask, and white, and gilt chairs; mirrors here, there, and everywhere; small tables crowded with knick-knacks, which sent a thought of pity to the unfortunate housemaid who had to dust and re-arrange them. Overhead, large chandeliers; underfoot, a showy, many-coloured carpet; on every side, in short, there was something to attract the eye, or rather force itself on the notice unpleasantly. Even the hot-house plants were victimized, they were all set in such very ornamental pots; and the cut bouquets, of which there were several on the tables, looked uneasy and out of place in their heavy gilt vases and gaily coloured jars. Lady Legh's sigh, as she looked about her, would not have been thought flattering by the master of all this finery, neither would the half-uttered exclamation, "I would rather live in our little old room in Bridge Street than here." But live, is not the right word to use; no one lives in rooms like these—they have an unused, touch-me-not air which is unmistakable. At last the door opened, and Ida came dancing in, swiftly crossing the large room to throw herself into her sister's arms.

"I knew you would come," she said, "I was quite sure you would. Oh! you dear old Millicent."

"Why, Ida," said Lady Legh, warmly returning the loving embrace, "I scarcely knew you!"

"No; I am in long gowns you see; but, Miss Roberts made me put on this smart one before she would let me come to you; that is why I have been so long. They are dressing up too—Miss Roberts and Julia. I can't think why our other dresses would not do. Still, this is very pretty; Mr. Roberts gave it to me to be like Julia." And Ida glanced at the rustling lilac silk, with its long train, and its fashionable sleeves, with the natural vanity of sixteen.

"Never mind your gown now, Ida darling, sit down, and tell me all about Georgie, and Esdaile, and Mamma; or, stop, go and say to Miss Roberts that I should like to take you to Sidcote for the day, and that I will send you back in the evening."

"Oh, delightful! thank you. I will be ready directly," and Ida was off again, turning at the door to say, "Isn't this a grand room? I can't think what mamma will say when she sees it?"

Ida had scarcely gone before Miss Roberts and her niece appeared, and were profuse in their apologies for having been detained so long "by several little matters" which required attention on first settling, at home. Without Ida's previous information, Millicent would have had no difficulty in guessing that those little matters had consisted in changing their ordinary morning dress for something more resplendent.

Julia looked very handsome—she was tall, and had a fine figure, and regular features; but there was a want of fitness and appropriateness in her, as in everything else in the house. There was no harmony about her, and her voice was hard, and her manner restless. Miss Roberts was equally smart and showy, and fidgetty in her attentions to Millicent, giving her a footstool, putting one of the glittering bead sofa cushions at her back, and repeating her name so often, that at last it seemed to Millicent that "Lady Legh" came at every other word. Of course, the wedding was discussed—the breakfast, and the speeches; while, with singular want of taste, the lion's share which Mr. Roberts had had in the expenses was fully dwelt upon.

"The bride looked so young; we were all glad she was married in a veil."

"A veil!" Lady Legh could not help exclaiming.

"Yes; I though you would have known that," said Julia; "Papa made her a present of it, and wished her to wear one: it was real Honiton point; and I must say, at forty, I never saw anyone look so young as she did."

"Hush, now, Ju, dear; don't go talking about age, we are all young till we look old. You will be proclaiming my age next." And Julia smiled rather unpleasantly, as she said, "Well, aunt, you can't set up to be as young as mamma, you know."

"Mamma!" already. The sound of the word brought home to Millicent the connection which bound her to these people. Her second mother (and she could not remember her own) was also Julia's.

Lady Legh was unusually grave and thoughtful as she drove away with Ida from Bella Vista, and the gay rattling talk of her young sister jarred upon her almost painfully. What an atmosphere that was for her, which they had just quitted; and yet she must be a looker on, and had little power to do anything to counteract it. But she would do what she could, remembering that in little things often lies the secret of

great success, and remembering, too, how earnestly she longed to be of use, she tried to recognize that here was a beginning. Millicent roused herself, and began to lead Ida's thoughts back to old times, to happy walks they had had in the lanes and fields round Sidcote; of still happier times whem they had gone together with the boys to St. Mary's week-day services. And to this gentle leading Ida responded, and the first excitement of her manner began to wear away, and she insensibly softened and grew quieter under the influence of her sister's presence. Ida began to forget the present in the past, and presently rejoined to some reminiscence—

"And don't you remember that poor, lame, sick boy who drew so well, at the red brick house over the corn and seedsman's shop. Have you been to see him since you came home?"

"No, Ida; and I think we will both go now. There will be time before luncheon," she added, looking at her watch; "but you will not find poor Herbert in his old home; his is a change. He has had a change like you and me, but for the worse; he now lives in a cottage in Mill Lane."

With some difficulty Lady Legh made the footman understand where she wished to go, and

the carriage almost filled the entire width of Mill Lane as it drove down it.

"A house at a corner, I think Mr. Howard said it was. Please Dixon, will you inquire for a Mrs. Hayden, she lives in this lane, and keeps a small shop."

The carriage went slowly on, Dixon walking by the side, and looking up at the long row of red brick cottages to the right. At last all doubt was removed by the small window with its array of common toys, barley-sugar in glass bottles, a small tea chest, with its red cabalistic lettering, a sugar loaf, and many other things too numerous to name. Over the little door too, which was standing open, was painted, in small black letters, Mary Hayden, grocer, tea dealer, etc.

"We will get out now," Lady Legh said to Ida, and as she went in through the narrow door, with her natural courtesy, she stooped to pick up the little parcel of sugar which a poor infirm woman dropped as she passed the lady at the threshold. The smile and the kindly glance from those sweet eyes went straight to the poor old creature's heart. She murmured her thanks with a succession of short curtseys and took away with her the memory of that little

deed of kindness to cheer her in her humble home.

Behind the crowded counter, piled up with a repetition of the same kind of things which were displayed in the window, Susan Hayden's rosy smiling face appeared.

"Ah, Susie, where are your mother and Herbert? I am afraid he has thought me long in coming to see him."

Susie blushed and smiled, and said her mother was with Herbert; it had been one of his bad times the last week. Would her ladyship please come in, and, opening the door behind her, she called "Mother!"

The next moment Lady Legh had passed through it, and was in the room where Herbert lay on his little uneasy couch. Mrs. Hayden was bathing his forehead with vinegar and water, and trying to soothe the pain. It seemed to the sick boy and his mother that years instead of months had gone by since they had seen their present visitor. Ida, in her changed dress and increased growth, was so altered from the little girl in the grey alpaca and brown straw hat of other days, that she stood behind her sister unrecognized. But Herbert's first words came with outspoken truthfulness, as he looked up

with a weary suffering gaze at the face bending over him. "You are not changed at all—mother was right."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Hayden, "poor Herbert has been longing for the sight of you, miss, or, I should say, your ladyship; things are so changed with us, that he thought, poor child, you would change too. I told him I knew it could not be so. Pray sit down, my lady, and pardon me if I seem to forget everything in the pleasure of seeing you once more."

Millicent took the mother's place by the poor boy, and laid her soft white hand upon his forehead; then she drew from them, not by direct question, the sad story of their troubles, and her soft eye kindled as the struggle to do what was right was pictured.

"I could not be easy to touch money that belonged to others," Mrs. Hayden said; "so I must go on trying to save the rest of the dividend due to my husband's creditors, and in time I hope to pay it. It seems hard on my Herbert to shut him up in so poor a place as this, but I thought it better than the heart of the town itself; and Mr. Roberts's workpeople begin to deal with me; and for the rest I must leave my children in God's hands, and believe

He will take care of Herbert; he always was ailing and weak when we lived in plenty, and in large airy rooms."

"Of course I was, mother," said Herbert, suddenly getting animated. "I should not be well, even if I lived at Sidcote; but," he added, touching Lady Legh's arm, "there are the woods, *your* woods, and I can hear St. Mary's bell, and I like that. I have nothing to do often but to lie still, and the sight of those trees, though they are far away, does me good."

"I must find you something to do," said Lady Legh, cheerfully, "and send you a stock of pencils and colours for your drawing, which I hope you will not give up; not when your head aches as it does now, but on your good days, you know. Mrs. Hayden, may Susan come up to Sidcote this evening? I will send Herbert some flowers, and two or three little things."

"Some paper and colours?" the boy asked eagerly.

"Yes, and some books too; but I must say good-bye now, for if that clock is right it is very late. Come Ida."

Ida, who had sat a little behind, with a shy feeling of being a stranger where her sister was at ease and welcome, hastened to obey.

"Miss Ida!" Mrs. Hayden apologized, "I did not know you. You must excuse it; you are so much grown. I am sure I beg your pardon."

Ida was half pleased at what she believed to be an implied compliment, said her good-bye in a pleasant, girlish way, and followed her sister to the carriage.

A glance at the clock in the hall, as she passed through, assured Millicent that it was indeed very late. On entering the dining-room she was surprised to see only Sir Stephen at the table. He had a newspaper in his hand, and had evidently assumed an attitude of waiting and patience.

"I am afraid I am late," Millicent began. "This is my sister Ida, Stephen."

Sir Stephen rose and gave Ida a cold greeting, which made Millicent again repeat—

"I am very sorry we are late. Take off your hat, Ida, and sit down. Where are Henry and Florence?"

"Florence had some engagement this afternoon, and could not wait for your return. It is half-past two. Shall I give you some of this cold chicken?"

The voice and manner were alike discourag-

ing. Millicent felt them to be so, and the efforts she made at conversation were not seconded. She wished Sir Stephen would ask her where she had been, and what had detained her, but he ate his luncheon and drank his single glass of claret, and said nothing.

In five minutes Florence came into the room, dressed for her expedition.

"Have you any commission, Millicent?" she asked. "I am going to walk into Dunsford with Henry. I hope you don't mind our getting our luncheon before you came, but I thought you must have come home. Dear Sir Stephen," she went on, leaning over his chair, without waiting for an answer from Millicent, "can we do anything for you in Dunsford?"

"No, thank you; you are not going to walk, I hope?"

"Yes; you know I have no carriage, and I am quite used to walking. I have promised dear old Mrs. Lennard that I would have a cup of tea with her some afternoon; so I shall go to-day, and get a long rest. She must restrain her desire to see baby, as nurse could not carry him so far. Dinner at seven, I suppose? Good-bye."

Then, as if the idea had suddenly struck her, she added—

"Ah! is not that little Ida of old times? How do you do? You are so immensely grown and expanded."

In another moment Mrs. Legh had glided away.

Almost immediately Sir Stephen left the room, and all this time Millicent had not spoken. Her voice failed when she tried to answer as he said—

"I hope you are going to rest this afternoon." And she sat still for two or three minutes, while Ida began to discuss Mrs. Legh in no very complimentary terms.

"She is very disagreeable, I think; don't you, Millicent? It reminded me so of old times, when she used to have those garden parties, and treat you so badly, be so loving to you if she had dull people she did not care about, or looked down upon, and so rude if any of her grand friends were there. Julia says——"

Millicent roused herself, and prevented any repetition of the Roberts's gossip.

"Never mind about Mrs. Legh, dear Ida. Now suppose you go and find the new box of croquet. I asked the Fergusons to come this afternoon from the Rectory, and you will be able to have a good game. You can go out by the

drawing-room window, if you like. I shall come almost directly."

Ida did as she was told, and skipped away with as much freedom as the encumbering length of the lilac silk would permit, while Lady Legh went to the study. The door was closed, and she knocked timidly, so timidly that the knock met with no answer.

She opened the door gently, and closing it behind her, went up to the table by the window where her husband sat writing.

"Stephen," she began.

He turned his head, and said in the constrained tone she was beginning to know too well—

"Well, Millicent?"

"Stephen, I hope you are going to ride this lovely day. Can I write anything for you?"

The gentle deprecating tone was not to be resisted. He smiled and held out his hand. She knelt down by him, and looked up into his face.

"I will try to be punctual; I know you like it; but I had really no idea it could be so late to-day. I went to Bella Vista for Ida, and was longer setting off than I intended; and then I went to see a poor widow in Mill Lane; who has a sick child, and has seen better days."

"One of Mr. Howard's *protégées*, eh, Millicent?"

"No, one of mine, before I left Dunsford. Mr. Howard knows the Hayden's now, but I used to go and read to the poor boy then. He was sometimes dragged about in an invalid chair, and had every comfort for his station in life; and now, oh, they are so poor."

It was disappointing that Sir Stephen showed no interest, but only said—

"Well, darling, don't go about too much in Mill Lane; it is not a very choice locality; and add punctuality to the list of your virtues. It does not matter with guests so perfectly at home here as Henry and Florence are; but it would not do with others to have the mistress of the house absent at stated times. And now as you are here, in the place for the discussion of business, I may as well settle our monetary concerns—your personal ones I mean. We never arranged what it would be right for you to have for your dress and sundry et ceteras."

"Oh, yes, we did at Paris, you know. You gave me so many things, and £30 too. I have got plenty indeed."

"Not enough, I think. By and by, when the people of the neighbourhood come from

London, I must have you appear to advantage, you know. I don't understand dress myself, but I wish you to have everything quite appropriate. Florence Legh can help you with her advice, and I suppose she is a safe guide in matters of feminine adornment. See, here are some notes I have got ready for you, and when they are exhausted there are some more at your command. I will get some pearls and a few jewels re-set for you. It ought to have been done at the time of our marriage; but somehow, little Millicent, I only thought of you just as you were, and we had no settlements and no formal declarations, had we?"

"Oh, no, and I never thought of that part at all."

"Ah, but I have thought of it since, and a legal form is being prepared, which you will have to sign. In case I die without a direct heir —without a son, I mean,—by this you, my Millicent, will be amply provided for."

She drew closer to him, his moments of tenderness like this were so precious. The summer sunshine of the June afternoon came in through the open window of the study, and seeming to pass over the great heavy library table, with its black cover, its desk, and its piles of

papers, and its many drawers, sought out and lingered on that fair young head as it rested against Sir Stephen's shoulder; kissing the shining hair, and illuminating the delicate outline of the throat and neck, and one small white hand and wrist, on which her husband's lips were pressed.

The notes lay untouched on the table; Millicent was not thinking of them now. Presently she said, in her low, sweet voice—

"You quite understand that I want—that I long to please you in everything; only——"

"Only what?"

"Only if I seem—and I can only seem—to have put anything before you, tell me at once that you are not pleased, and do not look as you did at luncheon just now, and speak in that way, as if I were some one else—not Millicent at all."

"Very well, I will try. Now take your notes, and leave me to finish my letter before I ride. Where have you left your sister, that grand young lady who I thought was still in the nursery or school-room?"

"Where she still ought to be, no doubt," Millicent answered. "Am I to spend all this only on dress and things of that kind, or may I——?"

"It is yours to do what you like with, darling."

"Oh, thank you so much," she said, brightening. "I will take great care of it." And with another kiss, she went to her room to lock the crisp bank notes in her dressing case before joining Ida on the terrace. On her way there, she went to Mrs. Bligh's room, and asked her to get some little dainties ready for Susan Hayden, who would most likely come that evening, and she was surprised at the old housekeeper's ready acquiescence.

"It reminds one of the dear old mistress' time," she said; and when Millicent added, "I will gather some flowers, too, the poor child is so fond of flowers," she was not prepared for the interest Mrs. Bligh showed, and their friendship seemed established.

On the lawn she found Ida with Mrs. Ferguson and her three daughters, who were sitting shy, and hot and tired after their walk, on the seats under the beech trees; while two youths, introduced as "my eldest son, and my husband's pupil, Mr. Savory," completed the group. Ida was standing, playing nervously with her mallet, and croquet seemed as far off as ever. It was wonderful how soon Lady Legh settled the sides

of the game, and how soon the players became interested, and forgetting to be shy, became talkative and merry. Croquet was then in its infancy, and those who knew something of it had to instruct the ignorant. Ida and Mr. Savory were the best players, and had the game in their own hands.

Mrs. Ferguson was soon perfectly at ease with Lady Legh, and found herself wondering what Mrs. Legh could mean when she had told her, a few days before, that everyone would naturally find dear little Millicent somewhat engrossed with her new position; just a little inclined to expect everyone else to recognize it. It seemed to Mrs. Ferguson that the stories she told of her numerous children; the dulness of the house in Church Court; the trials of a curate's life; and the heavy work, with its little pay, had never before found so interested a listener. By the time the grounds and garden—where Herbert Hayden's flowers, and a beautiful bouquet for Church Court too, were gathered—had been gone through, there was not a shade of constraint left in Mrs. Ferguson's manner. She only felt herself talking to a simple, natural girl, whose eager [illegible] and admiration of all the flowers, as she [illegible] at last, the basket on the seat beside

her, to arrange them, was as great as her own children's would have been. Then tea was brought out on the lawn, and the croquet players joined Lady Legh and Mrs. Ferguson, to rest between the first and second games, just as two fresh figures appeared on the scene. Mr. Howard, grave, stiff, and a little formal in manner; with him a man of perhaps thirty, whose face was full of lines and counter-lines, which, with the bald patch on the top of his head plainly seen, as he advanced, his hat in his hand, to Lady Legh, made him look many years older than he really was.

"Our reverend friend here," he began, "cannot introduce me—we fell in with each other in the avenue, and have arrived together—but Lady Legh must accept the homage of her cousin, Lancelot Vere, on no better guarantee for his identity than his own word—as a lawyer and a gentleman!"

The puckering up of every line in that odd face, as this jesting speech was made, was most amusing. The whole countenance laughed except the mouth, which retained its gravity, though the eyes were brimming over with the smile which the lips did not confirm.

Millicent extended her hand, and gave her newly-discovered relative a pleasant welcome,

offering him tea, which he accepted, and meanwhile looked about him with evident surprise and satisfaction.

"Sir Stephen will be at home soon," Millicent began. "I hope you will stay to dinner."

"Yes, indeed, and longer if you like. I am not *en route* to the Midhampton Assizes just now, and have not a clerk and a blue bag in Dunsford; but I am open to accept your hospitality, fair cousin, till to-morrow, or even the next day. Won't you introduce me to my fellow-pilgrim from the lodge, and to this bevy of fair ladies and gentlemen?"

Millicent began to wish Mr. Vere would drop the joking strain, for it provoked titters from the Fergusons and Ida, and made Mr. Howard more frigid than usual, who stood by Mrs. Ferguson, talking in constrained monosyllables, and scarcely responded to the introduction which Millicent made. Then followed some more light bantering talk, and Mr. Howard grew more and more cold and distant.

"Come, reverend and dear sir," said Mr. Vere, springing up, "let us enter the lists, and take a ball and mallet. Young ladies, will you receive a recruit on either side, from the law and the church?"

"Thank you, I cannot play croquet," said Mr. Howard. "Lady Legh, may I speak to you for a moment?"

"I shall not reply on the first part of that speech, Mr. Howard, except to say that I think you might do worse than play croquet; against the last part I protest. Lady Legh and I must ratify our cousinship by a passage of arms, if either side will accept us. Now then, fair cousin, black or yellow?"

"I will take yellow, directly; excuse me one moment, Mr. Vere," and Millicent turned towards the house with Mr. Howard.

"You were at the Haydens' this morning, I think?"

"Yes, about one o'clock; little Susan is to come this evening for some flowers and jelly for Herbert. He is very much altered."

"I have seen him since you have, Lady Legh; he is very ill. I think he has scarlet fever, and I ordered his sister *not* to come here this evening. If you will send the basket down to the Vicarage I will see it reaches its destination."

"Scarlet fever! Who says so?"

"The doctor, who has plenty of similar cases in Mill Lane now."

Millicent's face was sad and perplexed.

"I hope you are not frightened; but I thought it right to tell you."

"I am not frightened for myself, but there is Ida, my sister, who was with me, and there is Florence Legh's baby in the house."

"Yes," said Mr. Howard, shortly, "I thought of that."

"Then I am afraid for Sir Stephen; he did not quite like my going into Mill Lane. I suppose I must tell him?"

"That must be as you please. I trust no harm will follow."

"Yes, I think I shall tell Sir Stephen. It will be better, in case anything should happen; but I will not go near the baby—in this house it is quite easy to manage that."

On the soft grass, steps approaching were not heard, and Mrs. Legh stood close to Millicent and Mr. Howard before they were aware of it. The baby, little Stephen, just set down out of his nurse's arms to try his first tottering steps, fell, and cried, as all babies will cry under such circumstances. Millicent, who was nearest to him, drew back, instead of lifting him up; and bidding Mr. Howard good-bye hastily, went to rejoin the

croquet party, where Mr. Vere was causing much amusement.

"Look at her, poor little thing: how pretty she is!" said Mrs. Legh to Mr. Howard; "she is so entirely given up to the present that she forgets everything else." And as Millicent sent a ball, with good aim, against her adversary's, and finished with an energetic croquet, Mrs. Legh went on: "She puts her whole soul into that game, like a child. Look at her; could you believe, she never notices this sweet boy of mine, and lives in her own world. Ah, well," said Florence, "never mind, babykin darling, mamma and nurse care about him if Aunt Millie doesn't. Who are those people?" Mrs. Legh inquired, putting her glass in her eye, "I am so short-sighted, I can't distinguish faces at this distance."

"The Fergusons and Miss Gardiner."

"Oh, then I shall go in and rest. I am dreadfully tired with a long expedition into Dunsford; I was obliged to take a fly home. I have been to see several old friends. It is so delightful to me, though, of course, things are very much changed here since the days when dearest mamma and I were so much at Sidcote together."

Florence sighed; a certain fascination which, in those same old days, she had exercised over Mr. Howard began to re-awaken. "I am coming to the school to-morrow morning after service," she said, as they parted, "and if you can tell me of anything I can do, during the short time we remain, I shall be *so* glad. You have plenty of pecuniary help in Sidcote now, it would be idle in me to offer my mite to any of your good works. Yet, money is *not* everything; I find this more and more in our simple life—Henry's and mine—and there are sweets connected with small worldly means as well as cares. Good-bye."

So she left him—to walk home, with the thought that Sidcote would have been better ruled with Florence for its mistress. So she left him—having strengthened him in his opinion, that Lady Legh was worldly, and childishly engrossed with herself and her own pleasure. So she left him—with an impression gathering force that, after all, he was right, and his mother wrong; that Millicent Gardiner had given up all higher aims which once were dear to her, for self-seeking and self-indulgence.

And not only in Mr. Howard's mind was this subtle prejudice infused by the same influence. Mrs. Legh was one of those people who never

make a direct attack on anyone; who never absolutely express an opinion of another that jars upon the listener as unkind or harsh, but who do contrive, nevertheless, to set out with praise and end in insinuations, which have their effect, and surely leave a trace behind. Mrs. Legh had come to Sidcote prepared to find Millicent ready to surrender to her; she fully expected, by soft words and expressions of affection, to win her, and bring her under the power of her fascination. But she found her one who gently, though firmly, was capable of holding her own ground. She saw her loved; she heard her praised and admired; and the root of bitterness springing up, troubled her. In numerous letters to the absent—during calls on the people she had known well when on former visits to Sidcote—she managed to set afloat an idea which held back those who had known and, perhaps, loved Millicent Gardiner in her girlish days, from responding to any advance of friendship she might make to them; and made others—her superiors or equals in rank—"cautious," as they said, "how they advanced to her." "She will want to be a little queen, poor darling, and, being devoted to society, will throw herself into the arms of any who will receive her; but it will wear off in

time." And as Lady Senhouse, and Mrs. Brooke and half a dozen more of the leading people in the neighbourhood, read a passage like this in a letter from Mrs. Legh, or heard Millicent spoken of, by one who had known her so intimately and so well, in these terms, they took a resolution to watch Lady Legh well before they allowed her to assert herself amongst them.

There is a great deal of this underground insinuation at work amongst us. Mischief arises, coldness and reserve creeps over friendliness, eyes are averted that were once full of frank liking and tenderness, and we wonder how it all has happened. We cannot trace the evil to its source, perhaps. One eye alone ever does see the originator of the tiny spark which has set the train on fire. But that eye sees, and that ear hears, and it is often His will that the righteousness of the faithful, after having been under a cloud, shall shine even before men as the light, and their just dealing as the noon-day. There is not one of us who has not need to pray to have a *right judgment* in all things; not one who has not need to watch, lest some little jealousy, or but half acknowledged pique, may not influence us in some degree when we are colouring the faults of another highly, or magnifying some little

weakness or imperfection, or putting what we knew to be a false or exaggerated construction on the words or actions of a friend or acquaintance.

When Mrs. Legh turned into the house, as she parted from Mr. Howard, she felt tired, and the merry voices from the lawn irritated her. Crossing the hall she met Sir Stephen.

"Where is Millicent?" he asked.

"On the lawn with a heap of people, playing croquet *con amore*."

"Who are here?"

"Oh, Fergusons, and Robertses, and a tribe of girls and boys. I am going to rest till dinner, I am so knocked up with my walk, and a jolting fly I took from the town as far as the lodge gate, finished me. Are *you* going to play croquet?" she asked, turning from the bottom stair; "I hate it—it is the most foolish waste of time."

Mrs. Legh hated everything she did not do well; and, being short-sighted, she never took a good aim, and to be perpetually beaten, and invariably left at the second hoop, while the rest of her side were rovers, was not at all in her line. "Millicent is quite in her element," she added; "it is refreshing to see any one enjoying life as she does."

Sir Stephen Legh agreed with this parting speech of Florence, as he drew near his wife, and that bright smile welcomed him, which he had learned to know as his only.

Sir Stephen Legh is most wonderfully improved, was the verdict of the returning party to Dunsford, as they all agreed they had had a most charming afternoon; while Mr. Vere's first impression of Sir Stephen was the reverse of what he had expected.

"I am wrong for once," he thought, as they separated to dress for dinner. "I expected, from Mistress Legh's account, she had married an old fogy for money and position; but, that's a fine fellow, and they are in love with each other, if two people ever are, that's to say—of which I am by no means sure—and, as to my new-found cousin, she is something more than pretty upon my word. Very like the Veres—there is a picture of an aunt of my father's at Broughton, the image of her, and, by the by, I believe her name was Millicent—a saint to boot, and a lady bountiful, and that kind of thing, which this Millicent is ready for too, if Mrs. Legh is to be believed, though I hope Sir Stephen will shake it out of her. It's a pity if she is to turn out a strait-laced Puritan, I must say. She is worthy

of a better part on this world's stage, where we are all actors—some more, some less. Mrs. Legh's rôle is a very amusing one. I wonder whether she thinks we any of us believe in her reality!"

CHAPTER V.

FLINTSTONE CASTLE.

"Fairer than Rachel by the palmy well,
Fairer than Ruth among the fields of corn,
Fair as the angel that said 'hail' she seem'd,
Who, entering, filled the house with sudden light.

* * * * * *

Low was her voice, but won mysterious way
Thro' the seal'd ear, to which a louder one
Was all but silence—free of alms her hand.

* * * * * *

for she walked
Wearing the light yoke of that Lord of love
Who still'd the rolling wave of Galilee."

AYLMER'S FIELD.—TENNYSON.

"THIS basket is to be left at the Vicarage with the flowers," Lady Legh said, as she stood in the hall after dinner, bidding good-bye to Ida. "And there is a note for Mrs. Howard with it."

Millicent turned from giving these directions to see Sir Stephen standing by her side. "What a stock of good things there must be in that basket," he said. "Who are the fortunate recipients?"

"The poor Haydens, Stephen. Mr. Howard

has kindly promised to send them for me, because" —she lowered her voice, and clinging to his arm, said, "I don't wish Florence to know; but after I was at the Haydens' to-day, the doctor said Herbert had the scarlet fever, and I am so afraid Florence would be frightened about little Stephen."

"And you give no thought to *my* fears then, Millicent; you have other duties now, than putting yourself in the way of infectious disease. I cannot allow it. Once for all, I must repeat what I thought you understood before. I cannot have you encountering needless danger in this way. Now, there is Florence singing; let us go into the drawing-room."

"Please do not tell her about this, Stephen, I am so very sorry; though not in the least afraid for myself," she added firmly.

"Nor for *me*," he asked, with a look and tone so full of tenderness, that every thing else seemed forgotten. "Don't you think," he added, "that your catching the scarlet fever, would be rather worse for me than if little Stephen had it?"

"Yes, but—I should be so unhappy if I were the means of bringing sorrow on Florence. You will not tell her; she is so likely to be frightened, and I could not forgive myself if I were the one to bring trouble to her."

Millicent repeated this, and she was quite in earnest. The feeling she had of something near dislike to Florence Legh, made her the more determined in the caution she now exercised.

While Florence sang in her deep contralto voice "The Skipper and his Boy," Mr. Vere listening with evident delight, and even Sir Stephen was moved to praise, Millicent sat aloof, and was apparently untouched by it, and by the song which followed—"Tears, idle tears," to Lear's music.

Lady Legh bent over her work at a distant part of the room, and did not seem to be listening.

"She does not care for music," Mrs. Legh said to Mr. Vere, as she left the piano; "but what do you think of her? Have I exaggerated her perfections in any way."

"Perfection is perfection, Mrs. Legh. Explain how it can be heightened."

"Now you are in one of your law moods to-night, I see; you will cross-question me as if I were a witness for the defence."

"I wish I had the chance," was the reply, with innumerable puckers of that mobile face. "Get up some action, Mrs. Legh, that I may plead for, or against you, it don't matter which."

"Yes it does, very much; and with a barrister for my husband, I am not likely to want you."

"Many cases on in the law courts, Vere?" asked Henry Legh, sleepily. "I was so bored with heat and head aches, I escaped, but I suppose I must be on circuit in another month."

"I suppose you must," said Mr. Vere dryly.

"Those wigs are so awfully hot," Mr. Legh said again. "I get such a pain at the top of my skull; I can't bear it."

"It is to be hoped you won't get softening of the brain by the weight of your wig. A judge's is heavier, I am afraid. As I am getting bald, I rather appreciate the covering; and they are convenient appendages, when you have a troublesome witness on hand, and questions and replies are slow in coming to the surface; then is the time to shift your wig from left to right, and right to left; to push it back on your forehead, with a bold defiance, or pull it down over your brows, with a sullen determination, as you begin —'Now, Mr. So-and-so'—in those threatening accents my learned friend there understands so well how to use!"

Henry Legh did not catch the irony of this speech; but his wife felt it for him. She made a sharp reply, to the effect that it was not fair to

turn Sidcote drawing-room into an assize court; and Millicent was called to discuss a plan for an excursion the next day, to Flintstone Castle, and a drive home over the downs, for the benefit of the sea air.

Millicent entered heartily into the proposition, while Sir Stephen asked Mr. Vere if he could not extend his visit to another day or two. This he said was impossible, but he hoped to repeat it, and improve his friendship with Millicent.

In the midst of some interesting conversation with Sir Stephen, in which Mr. Vere dropped the jesting strain, and talked sensibly as well as brilliantly, the bell rang for prayers, and as Perkins threw open the door, Lady Legh rose to leave the drawing-room. Mr. Vere took a book from the table, but did not move, and the door was closed upon him. On the return of the rest of the party, Mr. Vere resumed the conversation with Sir Stephen, precisely at the point where it had been interrupted, and yet he was uncomfortably conscious of a wistful, almost sad glance from Millicent's clear eyes.

The likeness to the picture in his father's house struck him still more forcibly. The Aunt Millicent, and the story of her early death, which he remembered hearing in his childhood, came

floating back to him as he had listened to it long ago from his mother. "Poor little thing," was Mr. Vere's under-current of thought, while he carried on a discussion with Sir Stephen about some question of the day, and took the opposite side with the cool decision of a special pleader. "Poor little thing; she looks as if she longed for every one to be as good as herself, and I dare say she thinks me no end of a sinner, because I did not march in to hear a formal prayer read to a set of stupid, sleepy servants. Well, it is a remarkably becoming expression to Millicent, so I won't quarrel with it."

The drive to Flintstone Castle the next morning was very pleasant. The pretty grey horses trotted with swift even pace over the ground, Sir Stephen taking the reins, and turning his head now and then to exchange a word with Millicent, and to answer inquiries about the points of interest on the way, or to receive a compliment from the two gentlemen on the pace of the horses or the excellence of his driving. The day was very hot, but a breeze, as the party neared Seaforth, was fresh and invigorating. The sea lay stretched out, crested with tiny waves, flecked with snowy wreaths, which danced and changed their hue continually as the white clouds over

head cast their shadow on them. Every shade of purple, from deepest indigo to violet, rich and glowing, lay in varied and uncertain masses on the face of the waves, while patches of dazzling brightness smiled between. The rolling up of Sir Stephen Legh's carriage to the door of the principal hotel in Seaforth was an event in the little watering place. At a glance the inhabitants recognized it, and lodging-house keepers, hopeful when the sound of the wheels was first heard, retreated, as they caught sight of Sir Stephen on the box, with the exclamation of, "Only the Sidcote carriage drove in for the day." Then followed a history of the Leghs of Sidcote, delivered by many a landlady to her lodgers, from No. 1 to 30 on the Royal Esplanade; of the accident long ago, of the old Lady Legh's grief at the loss of her son and daughter, whose bodies were left by the retreating tide at sun-down on the fatal day, which found Sir Stephen the sole representative of his house; and, as Millicent stepped on the Esplanade, with Mr. Vere, she was pointed out as the sweet young lady "the baronet had been and married, when every one thought he was booked for a bachelor to the end of his days."

"She lodged with us once in the dining-room apartments, when her brothers came here to get

rid of the measles," was the information which Mrs. Fox, of No. 10, volunteered to her lodgers, as she waited upon their one o'clock dinner. "She lodged here, and never a nicer young lady breathed. Master Esdaile was very bad," Mrs. Fox continued, as she paused with a plate in her hand, while the three maiden ladies stretched their necks to see the party opposite the window without rising from the table. "Very bad the child was, and how she did nurse him! Why, I declare," said Mrs. Fox, setting down the plate with a jerk, "her ladyship is crossing the road, and is coming to this door;" and, disappearing without apology, she raced down stairs.

"How very rude of Mrs. Fox," said one of the ladies. "Well, *I* see no beauty in Lady Legh, if that is she. *Don't*, Jemima, go to the window!" in a parenthesis to the youngest sister, though how Miss Nottidge herself craved to get a nearer view of the group on the Esplanade, I have no words to tell.

"Do, pray, take care, Jemima; you will be seen," echoed the second sister.

"Dear me, that is a very stylish person, in a maize-coloured dress. Who is it, I wonder?"

And so the good ladies speculated, while, in the dining-room beneath, Millicent was cheering

Mrs. Fox's heart by a kind word and pleasant acknowledgment of old times.

"You were so kind to me when I was here, Mrs. Fox," she said, "with my brother Esdaile. I have never forgotten it—that night you sat up with him when he was so ill, and I was so lonely. Do you remember?"

"Deary me, Miss Gardiner—your ladyship—don't mention it. I know I was full, and pretty hard worked; but what was that? To think of your remembering to call now; so kind, I'm sure;" and Mrs. Fox greatly flustered, smoothed down her apron, and stood the picture of a smiling, neat landlady.

"I hope you are full now," said Millicent smiling, "and that you have less troublesome lodgers than we were. Esdaile is grown into a strong boy; and how is your little girl, who was so delicate then? I hope she is—" Millicent stopped: the immediate shadow on the honest face told its own story.

"Ah, Miss Gardiner—my lady, I should say—Nelly was taken the winter after, as you was here in the April. Dear lamb, none knows how I miss her."

If Millicent's smile of welcome and grateful acknowledgment of past kindness had been appre-

ciated, who can say how the look and word of sympathy which now followed touched the good woman's heart, and brought a fountain of sweet and tender feeling welling up within! What did it signify that the drawing-room dinner was at a standstill, that the Miss Nottidges would complain, that the batter-pudding below would turn out heavy—what was anything when weighed in the balance with the delight of speaking of her dead child to sympathizing ears—her child that many folks said was best gone, a poor ailing, delicate, pining thing—but the child, nevertheless, to which, of all her flock, the mother's heart clung most fondly? Oh! this blessed gift of sympathy; expressed, not by many words, but by a manner and a tone which goes straight from the heart to the heart. Surely it is worth our while to cultivate and exercise it more than we do, to walk about the world with eyes open to our neighbours' joys and sorrows, to be ever ready to share in these with the humblest of those about us, to let them feel that we feel *with* them and for them in the griefs and in the heart-joys which are common to us all.

"At last! My dear Millicent, have you been taking those lodgings for a month's sea air? What have you been doing? I am really quite

curious to know. Sir Stephen has ordered luncheon at the inn, and we are to walk up to Flintstone, and the carriage is to meet us on the other side of the hill; but it is getting fearfully hot, I think. Sir Stephen, do ask Millicent what she has been doing at that house on the Esplanade, No. 10, where dining-room apartments are to be had for the asking."

"Florence, you are very inquisitorial," Mr. Legh ventured to interpose; while Millicent turned quietly from the questioner, and, putting her hand in her husband's arm, walked thoughtfully towards the hotel. The little dining-room had recalled past times so vividly. All things seemed the same—the gaudy, faded curtains; the glass, covered with its yellow muslin; the chimney-piece, painted a dull grey, with its veins of black, indicating an attempt on the part of the painter to imitate marble; the china figures of dogs, and children with arms intwined, one of which Esdaile had broken; the faded Kidderminster carpet; the green and yellow tablecloth. Millicent seemed to feel herself in that room again; Esdaile ill on her hands; her mother complaining in daily letters of the burdens at home, and half reproaching her with enjoying herself by the seaside in those bleak March days, when

desolation reigned supreme, and Mrs. Gardiner had shrunk from going to Seaforth lodgings with her sick boys, and had preferred staying at home with Ida and sending Millicent instead. Then those weary nights when Esdaile had a relapse, and Mrs. Fox had come to the rescue to cheer, and comfort, and help; and Millicent, in return, had taught poor lame Nelly tatting and crochet, and woven in with the thread and cotton many a little word, which dwelt with the child during the rest of her short pilgrimage. It is so different *now*, Millicent thought, as she pressed her husband's arm. Can I be the same—*his* wife! Oh! never desolate or oppressed any more surely, while I have him!

"Come, let us go to luncheon, and then start for Flintstone," Sir Stephen said. "It is getting oppressively hot. What were you doing, Millicent at that house?"

"Only thanking an old friend for her kindness four years ago, when I was sent here with Esdaile and Georgie, and Esdaile was so ill, and I was so forlorn and unhappy. Oh! Stephen, those were such different days to these." She would have liked to pour out the whole reminiscence to him, but his rejoinder stopped her.

"Bury those days with the dead past, darling. I wish I had cut them short sooner."

"I don't," she replied; "it was very good for me; perhaps better than this is," she added, with a half sigh.

"That is not complimentary; so let us hope it is not true."

"I mean good in the sense of bitters being more of a tonic than sweets," she said, with a smile. "I cannot help being afraid sometimes that I shall get too happy."

It was indeed one of Millicent's great characteristics, that she could be so unrestrainedly gay and happy. There was the unconsciousness of a child in her enjoyment of all pleasant things, and her light step was the first to climb the grassy slopes leading up to Flintstone Castle, that afternoon, her laugh was the merriest, her face the most serenely happy. The amount of assistance Florence required, and the trouble the flowing skirts of her maize-coloured morning gown gave her, was untold. Then the "grass was so slippery, the weather so hot, the view from the top not at all worth the trouble of the climb." Mrs. Legh was what is popularly called out of sorts. She was a little offended that Mr. Vere did not devote himself to her, but went scrambling on, over the brown sun-dried slopes, as closely as he could follow his young cousin. Sir Stephen

was also in advance, and Mr. and Mrs. Legh were far behind. Flintstone Castle in itself had no attraction; there could at no time have been any architectural beauty about it, and now it is but a mass of thick walls, pierced by loop holes and small windows, and with but scanty remains of a plain Norman arch here and there, which could not excite the admiration of the most devoted archæologist. A hunting-lodge for the lords and barons of an olden time, built on the crest of a round-backed, headless hill, Flintstone Castle might at some time or other have been used as a watch-tower, when hostile fleets dotted the channel beneath; and in the large and wide hall stern faces may have gathered, and consultations may have been held concerning other prey than the red deer, lying hid in the tangled glades of the forest, which in those days formed a dark belt to the north of Flintstone, at a distance of two or three miles. Now villages and church spires chequered the landscape, while fields of emerald green, where the young wheat was springing fresh and thick in these early summer days, met the eye inland. To seaward, many a curved indentation of the coast, many a dim outline of headland and tawny cliff, skirted the sweep of the bay, which Flintstone overlooked; while the

great restless water beyond the line of shore, to the right and left, went rolling out to meet the ocean, vast and limitless, ever our faint image of the eternity, to which we are all bound.

"Who is it says something about a heart beating with content after climbing? One of your poets, who says untrue things for the sake of a rhyme, and leaves the reason to take care of itself." Mr. Vere threw himself on the grass as he said this, where Millicent was already seated, Sir Stephen standing by.

"The reason was more cared for than the rhyme in this instance," said Millicent; "it was one of the worst rhymes the poet ever made, in one of her best poems too."

"So you know it, do you?"

"Of course I do.

"'Small the wood is, green with hazels,
And completing the ascent,
Where the wind blows and sun dazzles,
Thrills in leafy tremblement.
Like a heart that after climbing,
Beateth quickly through content.'"*

"What a pity sensible people write such nonsense for the sake of writing. Fancy your heart beating quickly from content in climbing under a sun like this, blazing like a furnace."

* Mrs. Browning.

"But it might be a cool day, and the sun might be shaded, you know."

"It might, but it is not; however, poetry is not the only humbug we are obliged to admire, and pretend to believe in."

"If we pretend to believe, we are humbugs, too."

"Well, no doubt you are right, only I can't fancy you are one. I daresay you have faith enough for yourself, and a dozen other people. You see, I am not troubled with an overplus of faith myself."

Millicent was silent; the smile faded away she remembered the impatient gesture the evening before, when they had all gone to prayers.

"No," Mr. Vere continued, "depend upon it it is better not to believe in men or women, opinions or creeds, too much. The world is more ready now to acknowledge this, people are beginning to dare to say they are not bound to move in a groove, like the wheels of a locomotive, or to believe every old wives' story in verse or prose, because other folks do. We are talking like a book," he said, suddenly rousing himself. "Where is Sir Stephen? Ah! gone to the rescue there below—Mrs. Legh has stuck fast."

Millicent looked down, and a little to the

right, some hundred feet below them, she saw Florence and her husband on a narrow plateau of slippery turf—Mr. Legh entreating his wife to proceed, and she resolutely declaring she could not, would not, and dare not.

"They have gone too far out of the track to the right," Millicent said. "The grass is so slippery, and it is very steep just there. But Stephen will help them; Henry is a poor support for Florence."

"Very poor indeed; a little reedy fellow that your husband might set upon his shoulder."

It was evident Sir Stephen found the descent difficult, and Millicent watched rather anxiously till she saw him stand by Florence's side, and afterwards seat himself there, evidently waiting her time to continue the climb; the sound of voices reached Mr. Vere and Millicent, but no words could be distinguished. Meantime the sun had gone behind a dark mass of cloud, which came with amazing speed from the sea, and as it gathered round, the heat seemed to increase, though a fitful gust of fiery wind now and then blew over the hill.

"There will be rain soon; let us walk round the castle, and by that time those good people may have contrived to reach the top of this

wonderful hill. It might be the Matterhorn, for the fuss Mrs. Legh makes about it."

Mr. Vere and Millicent turned to make the circuit of the ruin, and as they did so, a large drop of rain fell on Millicent's hat.

"We must really make haste," she said. And then raising her clear voice, she called to Sir Stephen, pointing to the sky. He waved his hand, and nodded assent, and the three rose, and Florence set herself to the business in hand. The threatened ruin of that elegant morning gown, with mantle *en suite*, not to mention the dainty hat, with its flowing violet feather, which the pattering rain-drops foretold, no doubt hastened her.

"Push and pull, that's it," Mr. Vere called out. "Sir Stephen comes up like a veteran, and Legh uses the motive power pretty well, *en arrière*. Ah, I thought so!"

And as he spoke a flash of vivid lightning parted the dense mass of cloud, and the thunder rolled and reverberated like booming cannon. The sea began to seethe and boil beneath the murky sky, and the foam of the tossing billows looked ominously white and ghastly in the almost night shadows which settled on the face of the water. Cliff and headland were fast disappear-

ing in the inky mantle which wrapped them round, and the little town of Seaforth, with its formal lines of houses, and its small pier lying beneath Flintstone, became indistinct, too, in the gathering darkness.

"It will be a thundering storm," Mr. Vere said, with a laugh, which jarred on Millicent's ear, as it was simultaneous with another flash of lightning and a louder peal of thunder.

"Come under cover, quick," he said, drawing his cousin towards the shelter of the ruin. "I don't believe there is the ghost of a roof, but it will be better under the shelter of the wall than here."

But Millicent still lingered, gazing down at the three figures, now really struggling to advance. Florence, powerless with fear, was evidently dragging Sir Stephen heavily backwards, a weight which her husband behind had clearly much difficulty in supporting. Another flash of lightning, which felt hot on Millicent's face, deafening peals of echoing thunder, and then a cry from beneath, which was repeated from above, as Florence Legh fell backwards, taking those who tried to resist the shock with her, none having the remotest chance of regaining a footing on the slope of scorched grass,

which was literally as slippery as ice. Would the ledge of turf, with its uneven cropping up of limestone, save them? No, the force of the fall was too great, and in less time than it takes to write it here, the three figures had disappeared over the edge of the little plateau.

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Vere, as he laid his hand on Millicent's arm.

"Down there. I must. Stephen, oh, Stephen!"

"You must not, shall not," he said, forcibly detaining her. "They are out of our sight, but they cannot be far. There is another and a wider platform below; don't you remember? The furze bushes there are sure to stop the fall."

Mr. Vere's voice was lost in the burst of another peal of thunder, and then the heavens seemed to open, and the rain fell in a continuous shower. Blinded by it and the repeated lightning, confused and bewildered, Millicent felt herself dragged under cover of a wall within the castle; and then Mr. Vere spoke again.

"I will go, if you wish, and ascertain the truth. I can reach the first ledge and look over."

"Oh, I can't tell which is right. Perhaps there is danger for you if you go."

"None," he said carelessly; I have as many

lives as a cat." But his face was pale, and his lips quivered as he uttered the jest.

"If any one is hurt it won't be Sir Stephen Legh," Mr. Vere continued. "Poor Henry is the most likely to have suffered; but upon my word I expect it was more frightful for us to see than for them who fell. There is no fear of my being struck by lightning in a deluge like this. Say, shall I go?"

Millicent did not speak. She was lifting up her heart to Him from whom alone could come her help. And the hand of faith outstretched was grasped, as of old, by One who was mighty to save, when the sinking Peter felt his own firmly held at the very moment the waters were fain to close over him! The agony of fear and the terror of suspense died out of Millicent's face. Mr. Vere never forgot the expression there, as at last she raised her head and gently said—

"If you think there is no risk, or if you are willing to brave it if there is, please will you go?"

"Don't move till I return." And then Mr. Vere was gone.

Alone now, the fury of the storm unabated, the lightning flashes incessant, the peals of thunder following every one almost simulta-

neously, the rain falling in one ceaseless torrent—Millicent stood crouched under a thick wall, her head buried in her hands, sheltered but in part from the rush of the rain, and conscious only of one great dread—that her husband was hurt, seriously hurt—perhaps worse than that! The thought gave her a pang, which made her shiver and tremble so that she could scarcely support herself. The minutes went by; every one seemed like an hour to Millicent. Eye and ear were strained in vain to catch sight or sound of a returning footstep or figure. But none came. Afterwards she remembered with surprise how little she had heeded the hot flashes of lightning, the roaring of the thunder, the great flood of rain which fell with an "eerie" sound around her, and would soon completely penetrate her light summer dress. She remembered, too, how her lips refused to form even a word of prayer, how little she heeded her solitude in the very midst of the stormy wind and tempest. The only reality seemed her husband's danger; the only power the agonized clinging of her soul to Jesus as the help in trouble.

At last, there were other sounds than those of the rain, the wind, and the thunder—sounds of approaching footsteps, dull, heavy and plodding,

as of those who bore a burden. Nearer and nearer came the sound, and at last, through an opening on the opposite side of the ruin, Millicent saw Mr. Vere and a stalwart countryman carrying what was evidently a helpless inanimate figure. Almost at the same moment, Sir Stephen came in through a nearer doorway, and, placing Florence Legh on a stone within cover of an arch similar to that which had partly sheltered Millicent, sprang towards his wife.

"Thank God you are safe! my darling, my darling."

"What is it? Who is hurt?" Millicent asked. "Are you hurt?"

"No; it is poor Henry. We think his head struck against a stone as we fell; but he is, I trust, only stunned. Go to Florence, while I see about getting him to the carriage."

Millicent rallied herself, and, with one look of intense thankfulness at Sir Stephen, went towards Florence. She was in a fit of hysterical crying which was very hard to meet, and, covering her face with her hands, declared she dare not look at Henry. "She was half killed herself with fear and the shock of the fall; she should never recover from it; and no one seemed to think what *she* must feel. Where was the

carriage? Why did they let her poor darling lie there?" and then fresh sobs and cries.

A long and weary time followed, the most trying part of that day's sad experience. To find the carriage, and convey poor Henry Legh to it, was difficult; but not so difficult as to deal with his wife's undisciplined grief and selfish fears. The man who had assisted in carrying Henry Legh up the slope now guided the party to his cottage at the foot of the hill, in the village of Flintstone, where the carriage was to have met them. Here Millicent and Florence exchanged their wet clothes for the dry, but humble garments of the respectable mistress of the little dwelling. Here the surgeon, who had been summoned from Seaforth, examined the nature of Henry Legh's injuries, and, as he returned to consciousness, pronounced that he had had a slight concussion of the brain, and that perfect quiet and freedom from excitement were needful. The question then arose as to whether he was able to bear the drive back to Sidcote, or whether he should remain at the cottage for a day or two. The neat bed, with its check curtains, in the little room opening from the kitchen, seemed a safer resting-place than the carriage, and evidently the doctor thought so; but Florence, who

was really shaken and frightened by the fall, earnestly pleaded that her husband should be taken home.

"Fancy a night here," she said, "a night in this miserable cottage; I could not endure it, and Henry would be the worse for it. It is only this country apothecary's advice, because he wants to make a harvest out of the accident. You would far rather go home, would you not, darling?" she asked of her husband, whose languid eyes were fixed on her with a glance which was touching in its love. He tried to speak.

"I'll do as you like, Florrie. Why I thought it was all up with us, didn't you? Those furze bushes were a safe bed, though, just broke the—the——"

The doctor here interposed, and ordered silence. Millicent admired the cool decided way in which he ignored Mrs. Legh's uncourteous speeches; for indeed she seemed to forget that either he or the kind mistress of the cottage had any feelings that might possibly be wounded. No apology for the trouble they were giving; no word of thanks for the timely help of the man who, in search of some lost sheep, was battling with the storm on the hill-side that day, and

thus was on the spot when the accident happened. Nothing but lamentations and hysterical tears and complaints. A great contrast indeed was Millicent's quiet gentle manner, and her apologies for Mrs. Legh's apparent discourtesy more than made up for it in the poor woman's eyes.

"We would do our best ma'am," she said to Millicent, "if it's to hurt the poor gentleman to be drove home, why it seems to me that he's better in a cottage than a palace; it ain't such a miserable-like place seems to me. But there, I am thankful to have such a roof over my head, and gentry is different, no doubt. *I'd* put up with a little illconvenience if my good man lay like that," jerking her thumb towards the inner room, where the doctor still remained, with Florence and Sir Stephen. At last the latter came out.

"Stephen, if Florence cannot stay, and it is necessary, let me do so—if Henry's life is to be endangered by the drive."

"Mr. Blake does not say as much as that," was Sir Stephen's reply; "as to *our* staying (he laid a stress upon the pronoun), it would only add to the trouble we are giving these good people. Henry's is not a serious accident, I trust, though he is rather bewildered and confused.

When I think what it might have been——" Millicent's answer was to put her hand within his arm. "If those bushes had not checked us," he continued, "we should have rolled down some two hundred feet, and there is a rough stone wall at the bottom on which we should have fallen with tremendous force. It is a great deliverance; I have only a few scratches, and Florence is not hurt. That poor fellow Henry must have struck his head against the rock on the first plateau, before we went over."

"Well, which way have you decided," Mr. Vere asked, as he returned from a quick patrol outside the cottage, for the storm had spent its strength, and a calm had followed, only a few soft drops of gentle rain were falling from the light grey clouds which veiled the sky. "Well, how is it to be?" Mr. Vere repeated. And then another discussion followed, and finally the invalid was laid on a board in the carriage, Mr. Blake, at Sir Stephen's request, accompanying him with Florence, while another vehicle was brought from Seaforth, in which Sir Stephen, Millicent, and Mr. Vere drove home.

CHAPTER VI.

MILLICENT'S WORK.

"O Woman, take thy stand
Upon this high position,
And faithfully hand on
Till death itself is gone,
This great Commission.
Throned on thy husband's heart,
Whisper the message there
And let him, all around,
Within Home's guarded bound,
Breathe heavenly air."

"HYMNS FOR THE SICK AND LONELY."
C. M. N.

"YES, our dear little home at Kensington is broken up; it is so sad that I can scarcely realize it. But my dear husband will never be able to resume his profession, never."

Mrs. Legh sighed as she emphasized the last *never*, and looked at Lady Senhouse for sympathy. "Are you going to live here? I should hardly think that would answer, would it?"

"My dear Lady Senhouse, I could not wish

it. But Sir Stephen has urged our staying through the winter; he is so kind and thoughtful."

Lady Senhouse had known Florence from her childhood, and always blunt and straightforward, dashed into the subject headlong. "You would find it difficult to get on here with Lady Legh, and all her troop of new relations at her heels, as I suppose they are; then there is your little boy —when little boys or girls come on here, there would inevitably be a clash I am afraid." Florence shrugged her shoulders.

"Ah, don't you think all this has struck me, and dear Millicent is so, and,—well I don't know that I ought to say it—but she is naturally so taken up with her new duties and pleasures; and she has no more thought than a child, in some ways. Would you believe that she went to a house where scarlet fever was raging, last summer, and sat by the side of a boy ill with it, and then came here, where my baby of course ran the greatest risk of infection. It was the very day before that terrible Flintstone expedition, which makes me tremble when I think of it."

"Mr. Legh does not gain ground, I am afraid?" Lady Senhouse asked.

"Oh, no; and there is no hope of his ever

having the use of his legs. I look on him as a confirmed invalid now; and with a promising career as a barrister opening before him, it is so sad. We have let our little house furnished. Your pretty present to me goes with the rest."

"Does it? oh—yes; it was of the useful kind, I remember now—a writing thing—Davenport, or something; but tell me about these Robertses. How does it fit in here?"

"Well, better than I could have believed, thanks to Sir Stephen's forbearance. Millicent of course likes to be made much of, and the Robertses do *that*; I must say, I don't know any one who loves popularity more than she does. What else takes her once a week to inquire for the Fergusons' sick babies, or Mrs. Lennard's rheumatism, or the Bartons' half mad daughter. Sir Stephen does not allow any cottage visiting, since that scarlet fever time."

"Nobody caught it, however, which was fortunate," Lady Senhouse interrupted.

"No, but that was the merest chance; and I do think people ought to put home duties first. Mr. Howard I know agrees with me, though he is naturally disappointed at the way Millicent has backed out of all the help she promised in the schools and district."

There was an inconsistency in this speech, which Lady Senhouse did not fail to notice, but instead of discouraging the gossip about the absent mistress of the very house where she and Mrs. Legh were sitting, she rather drew it out. Sometimes, however, breaking in with one of her short, pointed remarks under which Florence winced.

When at length Lady Senhouse drove away from Sidcote, she carried with her an impression of Millicent, which was not quite a pleasant one, though the sweet bright smile which responded to her rather stiff bow, as the two carriages passed each other in the avenue, struck her.

"She does not look that sort of person," was the inward remark, though what "sort of person" Lady Senhouse meant, it would be difficult to explain.

And where had Millicent spent the afternoon during which she had been so freely canvassed by one who was a guest in her house—one whom she treated with forbearance and gentle courtesy, and with sympathy too.

The autumn winds were sighing through the avenue, and the yellow leaves of the elms floated slowly to the ground. The sky was dull, and a few watery gleams from the west, shot across the

slopes of the park, and the air was damp and chill.

It was not an afternoon to exhilarate or cheer, and in the town it had been more depressing than in the country; for the streets were wet with recent rain, and the little square of garden ground before the Fergusons' house, in Church Court, looked dark and drear.

The elder members of that large family were out of tune with themselves and the weather. Colds were hovering in the school-room, and had laid a firm grip in the nursery. The mother, tired and worn with the effort of keeping peace amongst the varied and conflicting elements of her household, oppressed with coming cold, and depressed with the large necessities of the replenishing of the family wardrobe for the winter, sat in her well-worn drawing-room, stitching up the sheets of her husband's sermon, and glancing at a sentence here and there, she sighed as she thought of the long battalions of empty pews in St. Mark's Church.

To Mrs. Ferguson, Millicent had paid a visit, and left behind her a trace of brightness and pleasantness, which is not easy to describe. Only Mrs. Ferguson felt happier than she had done before her visit, for it had been a relief to

tell her little home details, of Charlie's threatened croup and little Nellie's feverishness; a relief somehow to know that she was sympathized with, and a relief to turn her thoughts to the other subjects which were so easily introduced,— to the book, of which the loan was promised; to the flowers and grapes, which Millicent said she would send to brighten up the nursery.

Then from the Fergusons Millicent drove to the Parsons, to touch an answering chord, so few could reach, in the half mad girl Mrs. Legh had so lightly spoken of. The neglected child of a country attorney, whose parents cared only for show and fashion, and who, ever struggling to assert themselves abroad, were so miserably deficient at home. Poor Bessie longed and yearned for the tones of Lady Legh's voice; for the touch of her hand; for the little bit of fancy work or knitting which she would bring to show her, and try to initiate her in its mysteries. To-day she had taken an illuminated text for her room, at which the poor forlorn girl clapped her hands, and ran on in a garrulous stream of thanks and admiration, while Millicent promised to draw the outline of another, which Bessie might try to colour for herself. It was a recompense for the disagreeable manner of the mother, who half

resented this attention to poor Bessie, thinking it would be more of a kindness if Lady Legh invited one of the other girls to Sidcote, *that* would be patronage worth having. For this, and much more, it was a reward to hear Bessie say, "You have made me ever so much happier. I didn't know I had such a friend as Jesus before; but now I do. They may laugh, but He is my friend, isn't He now?"

Tears stood in Lady Legh's eyes as she replied, by laying her finger on the words of the text, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," adding, "But you must try to show your father, mother, and sisters, dear, that those who love Jesus keep his words, and live in love with those around them."

"Ah, but that's hard," the poor child said, thoughtfully; "that's hard—when every one is cross, and doesn't care for me a bit."

"Hard, but not impossible," were Millicent's words as she bent to kiss Bessie's half vacant unattractive face, and left her.

Then another visit followed, which was far more trying than those which had preceded it; but a visit, nevertheless, regularly paid, and always with the longing that some good might spring out of what seemed so hopeless and unpromising.

"Well, Millie," was Lady Legh's greeting, as she entered the drawing-room at Bella Vista. "Well, Millie, darling, I thought you were going to give us up," and the graceful elegantly dressed woman, who rose from the depths of an easy chair, embraced Lady Legh with great fervour.

"Isn't it a horrid day!" she asked shivering, and drawing a loose shawl round her; "but you are in your close carriage of course?"

"No; I am driving myself to-day in the little basket—I so much prefer it. It is rather damp and chilly, however. How are you, dear mother?"

"Oh, not very well; my cough has come back, and this room is full of draughts. Mr. Roberts has ordered a heavy curtain to divide it, and then I shall be warmer in this nook. The girls are both out; they are going to the Prestons' ball to-night."

"Not Ida?"

"Yes; she is seventeen—that is in her seventeenth year—and Mr. Roberts wished it so much. Such lovely dresses he has given her and Julia. You must see them, Millicent."

"I am sorry Ida is going; I think her much too young, to begin with, for a great mixed ball like that; and she is just the sort of girl to whom dancing is a more than ordinary temptation."

"Now, Millie, don't talk as if you were an old woman. Mr. Roberts says he thinks you try to keep pace with Sir Stephen, and to seem older than you are. We can only be young once, and moderate enjoyment of balls and so on is quite natural. Why, where can the harm be?"

"Dear mamma, I don't wish to discuss that subject now; please forgive me if I feel a sort of right in Ida for the sake of old days."

"Oh yes, dear, it's all quite natural. I am sure none of us can forget what a kind good sister you were. By the by, here is a letter from Georgie, he and Curtis are going to try for the scholarship at Sherstone. Curtis won't get it, for certain, and I expect Georgie will, he is very clever. Mr. Roberts says if he gets the scholarship he will gladly pay the rest of his expenses at Cambridge. It is such a happy thing for the boys that they have a friend like my husband. I am sure your poor dear papa would be thankful to know I am released from the heavy burden of care and anxiety which used to press upon me."

This reference to her father's name was the one thing Millicent could hardly endure patiently from Mrs. Roberts. She was hastily turning to another subject, when Mrs. Roberts said—

"I don't think you care for the boys as you

once did, Millicent. I am sure I am very sorry they ran over Sidcote too much in the holidays. Sir Stephen was very hard on them poor fellows, I must say." Mrs. Roberts spoke in a feebly offended tone, which Millicent knew of old.

For the twentieth time she explained, "Sir Stephen could not make any exceptions to dogs in the plantations—none were allowed there—and each of the three boys had one at their heels on the morning Sir Stephen had met them, and that, too, after he had expressly forbidden Georgie to take Skye there only two days before."

"Ah, well, poor boys! Of *course* we know that Sir Stephen is very strict and particular, —but *your* brothers have a claim, dear, as well as his cousin, I should think. How is poor Mr. Legh?"

"Not any better," Millicent replied; "there is no doubt some injury to the spine, I fear paralysis is creeping over him."

"How shocking! And isn't it unfeeling of his wife to go dashing about as she does. I heard the Prestons say that every one remarked upon it, and what a comfortable time they have of it at Sidcote. I always disliked Florence Mason, and I dislike her more than ever now. By the by, ought I to send her a card for the twenty-sixth, or

does she wish to be supposed an inconsolable wife, watching over her sick husband?"

"Are you going to have a party?"

"Yes; didn't I tell you. Mr. Roberts wishes me to send out cards for an 'At Home' and two or three dinners. I want to consult you about them. Of course you will come; and who would Sir Stephen like to meet? you must tell me, you know. Not those dreadful Bartons, and people like them, they can come in for the crush this day month; but dinner is another matter. How do you manage?"

"We have only had two or three people to dinner at a time yet, and now Henry Legh is ill, I think we shall be quieter than ever."

"Very hard upon you, a bride, I call it; and for such a distant relation, too; but you will certainly come here?"

Millicent gave a hesitating assent; a dinner at Bella Vista was not an inviting prospect; and yet, if refused, the offence would never be forgotten.

Happily at this moment Ida and Julia came home, and Millicent was spared a direct reply. Ida was all eagerness to show her ball dress, and took her sister upstairs to see it. There it lay on the bed, with all its appliances of wreath,

and fan, and bouquet holder. Shining pink silk, and tulle, because pink suited Julia so well, and Mr. Roberts wished them to be alike.

"He is a kind old creature," Ida said, "isn't he? though he is so vulgar, and makes me ready to faint sometimes, by dragging in your name as my sister at every breath, and talking of what 'Stephen and Milly said the other day,' and—"

"Oh, don't, Ida!" Millicent quickly interrupted, as Ida imitated the voice and tone of Mr. Roberts. "You have no right to accept the kindness of anyone, whom you turn into ridicule. Indeed, dear, I wish you had resolutely resisted going to this ball; your mother would not have pressed it, I think, upon you. You are too young —scarcely more than sixteen—and besides that, I am afraid your little head is very likely to be turned by all this finery. Ida, do you ever think of those happy times before your confirmation, nearly two years ago, and all your resolutions then, and our trying together to watch ourselves, and walk worthy of our great calling."

Ida threw her arms round Millicent's neck. "Yes, they were happy days, though we had no fine gowns then, and used to think it very grand to go to tea with old Mrs. Lennard; but, Millicent, nobody *could* be good here in this house. There

is nothing talked about but what certain people do, and what they don't do; and the Robertses don't feel sure of themselves or their taste, and so they are always uneasy and uncomfortable, lest the right thing should not be done or said. Then poor mamma grumbles and makes a fuss about her health, just as much, or more, than she did in Bridge Street, and we have not got you to set us to rights now."

"But, Ida, we are travelling a long way from you, and the ball to-night, and my question; try not to think of what you might be somewhere else, but what you may be here; and, dear Ida, don't forget our old watch-word, 'Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.' Don't you remember Mr. Howard's sermon from that text, the Sunday after the Confirmation?"

"Yes; but, Millicent, I must have made myself peculiar not to have gone to this ball, and there would have been a quarrel; and, moreover," said Ida, honestly, "I like to have all these pretty things, and I *love* dancing, and I like the feeling of knowing I look as well dressed as other people; it's no use denying it, and I can't help it."

Millicent sighed. Ida's bright, handsome face looked so true and guileless; but Julia's

little tap at the door, and entrance immediately afterwards, prevented any more being said. Millicent was quick to notice that Julia's manner to Ida was flattering and unreal.

"Won't she look lovely in that wreath, Lady Legh? it will suit her ten times better than it does me. I am getting quite jealous of her, I declare. Ida, have you told about?——" and Julia made a mysterious sign, and half whispered a name.

"Pray don't be so foolish, Julia," said Ida, blushing. "I hate it."

"Lady Legh knows Mr. Brooke, I daresay. Shall I tell about the flowers? We were at a little dance at Mr. Hayward's the other evening, and Mr. Brooke was there, and was very much captivated with some one, who shall be nameless, and to-day a most lovely bouquet has arrived for 'Miss Gardiner.'"

Millicent was vexed to see the flush of mingled pride and distress on Ida's face. She cut short the story of the flowers by saying she must go now, the days were getting so short; but her good-bye to Julia was very quiet and grave, and called forth the remark when she was gone, that Lady Legh thought an immense deal of herself, and was very proud and disagreeable; which

opinion, of course, Ida vehemently resented, and a stormy war of words followed, which ended in the poor child throwing herself on her bed, and crying as if her heart would break. All her pleasure in the coming ball vanishing, and within there was an uncomfortable sense of having gone back in the race, and of letting folly and vanity gain ground in her young heart.

"How can I help it, living here?" she sighed at last, "if I were with Millicent, I know I should be so different."

And so poor little Ida parried the question, and silenced the voice of conscience, and laid her sins, and weaknesses, and imperfections at the door of circumstances, as so many of us are apt to do. For very few there are who do not take refuge from the sting of self-reproach, or the whisper of the voice within the soul, by asserting that those around them, or the disadvantages, consequent on their position in life, have to answer for their faults. If I were anywhere but here—if I had more congenial companionship—if this person were not so unstable or another not so silly, it would be very different. As God appointeth our lot in life, and appoints the discipline suited to our individual character, this sort of reasoning is sinful as well as fruitless.

It is better to look every difficulty and every drawback honestly in the face—better to pray for help to search the very inmost ground of our deceitful hearts, and then to seek from the heavenly armoury for the best weapons wherewith to wage our warfare, and for grace to use every circumstance of our daily life as steps towards the heavenly kingdom.

"Millicent, I suppose your grand envelope contains a similar enclosure to mine?" Mrs. Legh said at luncheon, a day or two after Millicent's visit to Bella Vista. "Do look! how absurd! Forgive me, dear, but it *is* too overpowering;" and Florence passed a card with "Mrs. Roberts at home, November 26th, ten o'clock," to her nearest neighbour, Mrs. Brooke, who was at luncheon at Sidcote.

Millicent felt the colour rush to her face, as the thick cream-coloured envelope, from which the card had been taken, was examined with a contemptuous criticism, its glaring crest and cypher exciting a little undertone of remark.

"Let me look, Florry," said poor Henry Legh, who always made his appearance at luncheon, being wheeled up to the table in his chair, joining in what conversation he could, and perpetually appealing to his wife to help him out.

"There it is," Mrs. Legh said, "a miracle of Parkins and Gotto's high art," tossing the envelope over the table. "I shall decidedly give Mrs. Roberts the pleasure of my company. Henry, pray do not eat any of that cream, it is sure to disagree with you."

"Very well; some jelly then. I am sure you try to starve me. I am always hungry. I am quite tired of my invalid life, Mrs. Brooke, and mean to try to walk to-morrow."

He was always talking of walking, poor fellow, and the chances that he would ever put his feet to the ground again were daily becoming more slight.

"Yes, dearest, you shall try if you like. Sir Stephen looks very grave over those notes of Millicent's, which are of the same family as mine, I think."

Sir Stephen was glancing his eye over the notes, but he refused to discuss them, and Florence felt that she had gone too far.

"I think we saw your sister, Lady Legh," Mrs. Brooke now said, "at Mrs. Haywood's the other evening. She will be very pretty, at present she is rather too thin and needs filling out; but there is the promise of great beauty. My son, Albert, admired her excessively. Miss

Roberts is a fine girl; but though they were dressed alike, no one could possibly imagine they were sisters—quite a different style. How old is Miss Gardiner?"

"Within a few months of seventeen," said Millicent. "I am sorry she is going out at all yet."

"It is almost a pity; and it was a very mixed party, you know. I have to go everywhere, and do the civil, especially as an election is at hand; but the Haywoods are not at all people one cares to have much to do with."

Millicent did not pursue the subject, and turned it skilfully into another channel—away from the Robertses, and Ida, and all the gossip, and disagreeable allusions which always seemed to follow that name. But when the Brookes were gone, and Millicent and Florence were left together with little Stephen, the latter returned to the charge.

"About this 'At Home,' Millicent. What absurd pretension it is. What are we to do?"

"I have not consulted Sir Stephen yet; we have a dinner invitation for the sixteenth also. Oh, baby, baby!" and Millicent ran to rescue a book of photographs from little Stephen, who had dragged it from a table, and was employed

in squeezing up the leaves in his small hands. "How clever of him!" was his mother's remark; "he actually thinks it is his own scrap book. Oh! don't make him cry, Millicent; poor little man, he is but a baby."

"I know that," said Millicent; "but that is no reason why he should destroy a book. Those are the Italian photographs which Stephen values so much, too. One, I am afraid, is quite spoiled. Children ought not to catch hold of everything they see."

"Nonsense, Millicent; we shall see how you manage your own some day, as Lady Senhouse said," and then followed a long string of what Lady Senhouse had said, and what Mrs. Brooke had said, and twenty other people beside, and Florence succeeded in making Millicent feel very uncomfortable, and in leaving behind many false impressions, by her manner of repeating the words which were never intended for repetition, and which it was mischievous to repeat.

Ah! how many are the heart-aches, and jealous pangs, and feelings of wounded pride, of which the idle tongue is guilty. Of all infirmities and weaknesses which abound amongst us, surely foremost are the sins of the tongue. Millicent's sensitive nature was wounded now, and losing her

self control, her sweet temper failed her, and she was very near, what she had always tried to avoid, a quarrel with Florence Legh.

"If Mrs. Brooke did say that about me, Florence, I don't want to hear it; nor did she expect that you would tell me, I am very sure. I think it is so wrong of you to come to me with all the remarks people may make about me, and so betray their confidence, and make me uneasy and constrained when I next meet them."

"'So wrong!' my dear child; I am not Ida Gardiner, to be lectured. I thought it might help you a little to hear the opinion of those moving in society, like Mrs. Brooke and Lady Senhouse."

"Florence, that is not true; you do not wish to help me, and you must let me say, I do not need your help; if I did, I would ask for it."

"You are exceedingly unkind, Millicent, when I have done all I can to remove, in the neighbourhood, the impression that you are contented with the Roberts's set, and like to associate with those who make much of you. I think, Millicent, remembering my unhappiness about my husband, you might be more considerate."

Millicent felt very angry now. Can anything be more provoking than for the person from

whom you think you are enduring a great deal, suddenly to put herself in the position of the aggrieved, and turn you into the aggressor? A hasty—nay, angry—retort was on Millicent's lips, but, with a great effort, she repressed it, and left the room. She went into her husband's study, but it was empty. On the table lay a heap of letters, and Mr. Howard's writing on one envelope attracted her, and the obtrusive arms emblazoned in red and gilt, which had been handed about at luncheon on another. She went to the bay-window and looked out, but a dull rain was falling, and she turned away, and drawing Sir Stephen's chair to the fire, began to go over the trials of the day.

"It is impossible," she thought, "to be quite happy while Florence Legh is here, and I believe she will never go away. Stephen is too kind to turn them out under their circumstances, and Florence will never voluntarily leave Sidcote. Oh! that day at Flintstone. How much has sprung from it! and that accident was her fault—it was all from her silly fears and helplessness. She is intolerable; and yet I don't know why she should dislike me, and do everything she can to make me uncomfortable. Of course it is not pleasant to hear what these people say,

implying that I married Stephen for worldly ends, that I am anxious to push myself into the highest society of the neighbourhood on terms of intimacy; that——"

Millicent's tears began to fall fast, and the pattering rain of the late October days splashed against the window with a dreary sound. But the few short sobs relieved her, and the reaction came. Sorrow that she could be sorry, much less angry, about such trifles; still more that she should have cherished and given way to unkindly feelings; then confession of her fault to the Ear that is ever open, and an appeal for the Help which is not sought in vain. An hour later, when in the gathering twilight, Sir Stephen came into his study, he found his arm-chair occupied.

"Is it you, Millicent?" he asked, but there was no answer. He went up to the chair, and bending over it, kissed his wife's forehead.

The kiss awoke her, and she started up. "I have been asleep, I suppose. I came here to find you, and sat down to wait till you came in."

"Well, stay now that I am come," he said, "and let us make a blaze." He threw a log upon the fire as he spoke, and the light sprang up merrily, and as Millicent leaned back in the chair again, fell upon her face.

The traces of tears were there, and she looked pale and tired. "We have to dine at Hale End this evening, Stephen; what time is it?"

"Scarcely five; the days are so short now."

"Stephen, may I have my cup of tea brought here? and may we have a talk?"

"Yes, we certainly *may*," he said; "but you are to be quiet, and I shall sit on the lowly stool, of which you generally take possession. I happen to want a talk, too, and a cup of tea."

"How nice," she said, earnestly, putting her arm round his neck, as he settled himself at her feet; and as she thought how few and precious these *tête-à-têtes* were becoming, she sighed.

A knock at the study door, announcing the arrival of the tea, made Sir Stephen rise, and going to the table he brought two letters from it, and then, when they were alone again, resumed his position.

"Now, look here," he said, "here are two notes about which you will hear from others, and so I mean to tell you their contents beforehand. This," holding up the envelope with the Roberts's fine crest, "was enclosed in the other. I am going to burn it at once. Stay; no, I must return it to Mr. Howard, as it is his property not mine. It is a proposal from Mr. Roberts to head

a subscription list for the transepts to St. Mary's Church with £100. I decline to sanction the addition to the church by such means, and I doubt very much if the money Mr. Roberts so magnificently offers might not be employed more to his own honour. There is a large family in Dunsford at this moment amongst those who suffered by his father's bankruptcy years ago, let him take one of the poor boys and send him to school for a year or two with the £100. It is a foolish, self-confident note; read it, Millicent."

She did so, and as she glanced over the contents could not contradict her husband's assertion.

"This is Mr. Howard's," Sir Stephen said, "at which I wonder still more; taking for granted that I shall have the architect's opinion at once, and so on; read that too."

Again Millicent obeyed; but was silent as she returned it to her husband.

"I shall not have the church pulled about at all at present; when I see the need for the poor people—my tenants, and others in the district—I shall take what steps I choose, and when I want Mr. Roberts's money, I will ask for it. Mr. Howard ought to know that a church built by the dead, in memory of the dead, is sacred, and that to me belongs the right, as the sole survivor of my

family, to increase the accommodation when a fitting time arrives."

"You think it has not arrived then?" Millicent asked.

"I do. It has suited the good people of Dunsford to stroll out to this bright, pretty little church for the last two or three years, and forsake their own parishes. The tide may turn any day; Mr. Howard may resign the church for a higher emolument; or, the good old rector of Dunsford may die, and a new one change the face of things there. Then there would be room and to spare, I fancy, in St. Mary's for the people of Sidcote."

"The faculty, as they call it, can be obtained without your consent, can't it?"

"I believe it *can*, but I doubt if it *will*," Sir Stephen said decidedly. "Mr. Howard has discussed this matter with you then?" he added, almost sternly.

"He told me about it, or rather, Mrs. Howard did—of the increasing need, and of Mr. Roberts's proposition, and that there was little doubt the money could soon be raised."

"Well, we shall see," was all that Sir Stephen said, and the glimmer of the fire-light showed Millicent a hard, sarcastic expression on his face she did not like to see there.

"I am sure you will do what is best for the people around you," she gently said. Then, after a silence, she asked, "What answer do you wish me to give to those Bella Vista invitations?"

"I shall be in London that week, and you can come too, if you like, and if it will not be too much for you; if not, my absence will be sufficient excuse."

"I think not, dearest; I must go to the dinner especially, which is to be given in our honour."

How far back Millicent seemed thrown when Sir Stephen said: "I cannot enter into that sort of formal intercourse with people like—I mean with Mr. Roberts. If he had had any good taste he would have left us to make the overture; but, darling, I dislike the subject. You know it is painful to me to get upon it."

"Would you go this once, Stephen—only once. I should be so very, very grateful."

"Nonsense, Millicent; I must still say no, not even this once will I go."

Millicent was silent; she felt tired and weary, and the chime of the clock telling her it was time to go and dress, she rose to leave the room.

"Stop, Millicent. You do not take to heart all poor Florence Legh's teasing, I hope," for a languid, listless air about his wife struck Sir

Stephen. "There seems nothing to be done at present but to let them stay on here, and the house is large enough. So that we need not interfere with one another; and it strikes me that Henry, poor fellow, will never be anything but an invalid. We could not very well do otherwise than we have done; but I am not blind, Millicent, and I see Florence is cantankerous sometimes, or, as you would say, 'trying'; but you are too sensible to care about it, sweet one?"

"Sometimes; not always," Millicent replied, and then escaped to her own room. On her way there she passed the door of the Leghs' sitting-room. It was open, and she saw Mr. Legh in his chair by the fire, little Stephen rolling about the rug at his father's feet, and continually opening his mouth for the bon-bons which were dropped into it.

"Is that you, Florry?"

"No, Henry, it is I; do you want anything?" Millicent inquired.

"Oh, only some one must take away this youngster. I have emptied an entire box of goodies, and he is getting obstreperous."

"I will take him to the nursery. Come, Stephen."

"Are you not going to dine at Hale End to-

night?" Henry asked. "Florence has been dressing for the last hour. Won't you be late?"

"No, oh no; three-quarters of an hour is enough for me." And as she held little Stephen in her arms, letting him play with her chain to keep him quiet, deep compassion for the invalid before her rose up within, and self-reproach was mingled with it.

"I am afraid you are often very dull, Henry," she said.

"Why, yes; there is not much variety in my life just now, scrambling down to luncheon, and then shelved again; but I shall get well, you know, the doctors all say so; only it is so many months lost of my profession, and I have so little else to look to for that boy and Florrie."

"Have you all the books you like?" Millicent asked. "Can I lend you any of mine."

"Thanks, my eyes take fits of aching when I try to read much; and there's a heap of books lying there I haven't opened yet," nodding his head in the direction of a small table, where rows of yellow labelled novels lay. "All the stories seem alike when I do read them, somehow—awful trash."

"I will bring you some books to-morrow, and if your eyes ache I will read to you, as I have

heard Florence say it tires her to read aloud. But good-night now; Stephen is sleepy. Say good-night, papa."

But Stephen would not say good-night; and as if to revenge himself for the five minutes quiet he had maintained in Millicent's arms, he began to cry and roar, and struggle to free himself.

"You must come to bed now, baby; papa is tired; you must not cry." And Millicent held the child with a firm grasp, and was carrying him away, when the nurse, who had been dressing her mistress in an adjoining room came hastily in. In another moment Florence herself appeared.

"What are you doing to him, Millicent? Take him, nurse. Sweet pet, what is the matter? Get the chocolate creams, and give him another. My sweet darling—there! You have such an unfortunate manner with children, Millicent."

Millicent thought it better to leave the scene of action; but as she did so, she heard Henry Legh declaring the child had been stuffing bon bons all the time he had been there, and protesting he would be sick; while the nurse and Florence kept up a cooing chorus of comfort and remonstrance, which, with the help of the chocolate, lulled the storm.

Another hour or two had passed, and the guests were all assembled in the spacious dining-room at Hale End.

Many pretty and intelligent faces were gathered round the well-appointed table, and everything looked as bright and pleasant as a dinner party will look with the help of flowers and ferns, glass and china, and enough plate gleaming amidst them to be ornamental without being oppressive.

The conversation was animated and pleasant, for Lord and Lady Senhouse were a genial host and hostess, and Millicent enjoyed it—as was her wont—thoroughly, and forgot herself, and all her little grievances and vexations.

The curate's wife, who had dressed amidst the uproar of a chorus of little voices, and the meddling of a heap of little obtrusive fingers, looked at Lady Legh, and inwardly decided she was the most fortunate and happy of women. Miss Berners, a lady who carried about with her the ever present burden of added years, which she tried to throw off by an affectation of youth, raised her glass to her eye, and whispered to her neighbour "that she was a pretty creature, but surely not so young as people made out—eight-and twenty at least,"—the age, by the by, to which

Miss Berners in her fortieth year acknowledged she had reached, but always declined to say how much more!

Lady Senhouse, as she watched Millicent's graceful self-possession, and saw from her end of the table what an animated conversation she maintained with Lord Senhouse, and how unconscious and natural she looked, again said within herself, "She does not look like the sort of person Florence Legh describes. I daresay she is a little bit jealous of her, and that makes her so ready to pick holes in her." Still more was Lady Senhouse ready to give Millicent her meed of praise, when she saw how well she acquitted herself in that trying hour in the drawing-room after dinner, when the cup of coffee is slowly sipped, and some young lady plays a piece of music to which no one listens, and photograph books are idly turned over, and the lady of the house represses a yawn, and wishes some one would talk or laugh, or do something.

Sad to say, a little bit of not very kindly gossip is hailed on these occasions, but to-night it was not needed to awaken the dormant energies of Lady Senhouse's guests. Here was Sir Stephen Legh's new wife to be talked to, to be looked at, to be fawned on or patronized, as the case might

be. And she sat calmly in the midst of the group of ladies, looking as serene and gentle as she was bright and pretty. Even the sharp, inquisitorial questions of an awful old lady, in black velvet and diamonds, who was the widow of an earl, failed to ruffle her. To all her string of interrogatives she had a quiet answer, "Yes, she had lived in Dunsford for some years, in Bridge Street." "Her step-mother was now Mrs. Roberts." "The paragraph in the 'Dunsford Star' was true. Mr. Roberts had proposed to give £100 to the enlargement of St. Mary's church." "No, she had not seen the paragraph. Very likely Mr. Roberts might have had it put in," and so on. Old Lady Lilstone gave her up at last, and relapsed into a half dozing state; while a Mrs. Harcourt, great in the so-called charitable world, cross-questioned her upon the ladies' committees to which she intended to put her name, the societies she meant to subscribe to, the tracts she liked best to distribute, and the celebrated preachers of the day, whom she had heard.

Then came Miss Berners, with her soft insinuating voice, and full of schemes for a hot friendship; she expressed a fervent desire to learn how to illuminate like Lady Legh; she had seen such a lovely text at Way's shop, in High Street,

Dunsford, glazed, and had found out who had done it; would she give her a lesson some day?

At last the black figures of the gentlemen began to appear in the drawing-room, a signal for more animation on the part of some of the ladies, and attention was withdrawn from Millicent. Florence, who had been in dreamland with old Lady Lilstone, now rallied, and was led off to the piano to sing, and her rich contralto voice was soon ringing through the room. Then it was that Millicent found her way to a distant part of the room where two or three people sat apart, unnoticed by the other guests, and who were asked to come in at nine o'clock, to take a cup of tea and eat a dry biscuit, and feel themselves *de trop*. Amongst these were the wife and daughter of the Hale End doctor, and the niece of Lord Senhouse's man of business, and the governess, who was expected to talk to stray people in the drawing-room. Millicent glided round to them so unobtrusively, that the move was scarcely noticed; and, entering into a little conversation, broke the ice of miserable constraint and discomfort by which the poor ladies were bound.

Just as Lady Legh was waking a smile of real interest and amusement on Miss Hastings' frightened face, a footman passing with tea, clum-

sily upset a silver cream jug over the mother's blue silk dress. An exclamation of dismay escaped her, and then the poor lady began to wipe it with her pocket-handkerchief, declaring it was no matter, and rather resisting Millicent's expressions of concern.

"If it is sponged at once with cold water, it will not be spoiled, I think," she said. "You must go and have it done directly."

"Oh no, pray, don't trouble yourself, pray; it's really of no consequence."

But Millicent knew it was of the greatest consequence, and Lady Senhouse's governess was put into requisition, and Mrs. Hastings persuaded to leave the room with her, while the needful operation was gone through.

"How kind of you to trouble yourself about mamma's dress," said the daughter. "It is her best, and never worn but once before, when we were here after a dinner party a year ago." And then there was a look of genuine gratitude, and the poor girl began to think this party was much nicer than such occasions usually proved; for Lady Legh's example of talking to the Hastings and Miss Smith, was followed. Miss Berners came towards the group, and the curate's wife who had held aloof, and one or two more

also; while Millicent was standing at Sir Stephen's side by the piano, before Lady Senhouse had time to observe where she had been.

Such trifles as these may not seem worth recording, and yet they are the little brighteners of the lives of others, which look so small that few give them a thought. They lie within the reach of many, and though to render them with grace and tact is not given to us all, still there is scarcely any one who has not the power to make another happier, and reflect a ray of brightness on those who need it. A kind word, a kind look, an expression of real sympathy or interest, how sweet it is to the burdened and weary one, whose sensitive nature may be often wounded by apparent slights and cold insensibility from those in a superior position to themselves. A basket of flowers from a garden or a greenhouse sent to those who are without them; the offer of a drive to those who have no carriage; the loan of a book; the prescription for some trifling ailment; the note of kindly inquiry—all are often more appreciated than is commonly believed. There are some who pant for missions to the sick in hospitals, for strength and opportunity to go amongst the lanes and alleys of crowded cities—to sit by beds of suffering,

and soothe the rugged pillow of the dying. And these are often the young and enthusiastic spirits in the upper circles of society, whose husbands or parents may look coldly at their schemes of benevolence, and in some cases actually forbid their fulfilment.

May not such find opportunities of usefulness nearer their own sphere in life? It may not be given to them to bind up the wounds of the miserable and forlorn ones, lying helpless in the highway—but it may be given to them to cheer the heart of the overburdened mother of a family by tender and ready sympathy—to shed around and about them the brightness which shines out from the soul of those who live in the light of the Sun of Righteousness, and long that all should bask in the same blessed atmosphere. Such as these carry about with them a treasure which gold is worthless to buy, and, thinking no little act of kindness or consideration for others too small, lay up a rich harvest for days to come, grain by grain, ear by ear, till at last they shall come again with joy, bearing the full weight of the golden sheaf with them.

CHAPTER VII.

CONTINUANCE IN WELL-DOING.

"Cross against corslet;
Love against hatred;
Peace-cry for war-cry.
Patience is powerful.
He that o'ercometh hath power o'er the nations.
Stronger than steel is the sword of the Spirit;
Swifter than arrows the light of the truth is;
Greater than anger is love that subdueth."
"THE SAGA OF KING OLAF."—H. W. LONGFELLOW.

IT is good to pause sometimes amid the hurry of life, and all its little fretting trials, and minor cares, and petty annoyances, to pause and try to realize what this very hour, as it passes, is bringing to the countless thousands apart from our own small world, our own interests and circumstances. The thought is in itself enough to hush the grumbler's low monotone; to take the sting from a passing irritation; to humble the proud and confident, whose self love may have been wounded; to make the thankless thankful and the discon-

tented glad. Farewells to the dying, bitter parting from the living, sorrowful watching over beds of sleepless agony, endurance of that bodily pain which no human skill may alleviate, grinding poverty, actual starvation, disease in all its many forms; is not every hour, as it passes, filled with the burdened cry of thousands? and may not, nay, will not, most surely the same cry be our own, before we pass from the things which are seen and temporal, to those which are unseen and eternal? Sometimes it is good to grasp the reality of what we are all so apt to think of as a vague story, which does not affect us very materially, and the like of which may never happen to ourselves. Ah, if the history of one hour we have spent in idleness, in peevishness, in rebellious murmurs against small crosses and worries, could be written out and laid before us, with all the circumstances of grief and death with which its moments have been fraught to a great multitude, how should we often hide our heads with shame. Thank God there are many joyful stories, too, which might be revealed, of love, and faith, and truth—the great brighteners of every earthly lot—and there are the sunny places of childhood and youth to gleam brightly on the page. But for the most part the shadow

of sin lies upon the world, and we must feel and know that it is so, till we go to the land where all sorrow and sighing shall flee away for ever.

The pretty room at St. Mary's Vicarage was warm and radiant with the gleaming light of a blazing fire one dull November afternoon. It had been a good day with Mrs. Howard, and she was lying quietly to rest, after a busy morning of arranging work for some poor people, and settling the tangled accounts of the St. Mary's Clothing Club, which the schoolmistress had brought her. Mrs. Howard was tired, but it was a pleasant sort of fatigue, and she was free from pain, and full of tender grateful feelings for the comforts which surrounded her. Some such thoughts as those with which this chapter opens flitted through her mind; and, as her son's firm decided step was heard on the gravel drive, and the click of his latch key sounded, as he opened the hall door, her eyes filled with tears, though her lips still smiled, as she said, "May God comfort those who are childless, or whose sons are a sore grief, instead of a joy like mine."

He came into the room now, and, bending over his mother, kissed her, and inquired what sort of a day she had had; and then, pushing

aside the table, covered with tickets and papers, he said, "You have been doing too much, mother."

"No, indeed; I am up to any amount of work to-day; it is you who have to be scolded on that score. How cold your hand is; sit down, Maurice, and tell me what it is." For her quick eye saw the rugged lines in her son's face were deep, and his eye was burning with an expression she knew well—of zeal and earnestness in the right cause perhaps, but not tempered with the love, by which *all* might know whose disciple Maurice Howard really was.

"Look," she said, "there is a cup of coffee in that little pot waiting for you; Annette put it on the hob to keep it warm. But you are very late; I began to think I must have the lamp, and cheat you of this twilight, or rather fire-light hour. Have things gone cross to-day, Maurice?"

"The old grievance, mother; but when I see it right to assert myself I do so, and, as Miss Strong expressed it to-day, 'Where I put my foot there I keep it.'"

"Dear Maurice," said his mother, laughing, "who doubts it? But," she added more seriously, "do not press the enlargement of the

church on Sir Stephen—let the matter rest. I feel sure, from what Millicent said——"

Mr. Howard made an impatient gesture. "My dear mother, I doubt if we really need permission from Sir Stephen Legh; if Mr. Roberts's hundred pounds is followed by a few more, I shall apply for the faculty, and commence operations in the spring. I am certain the bishop would be on our side."

"Yes, but you could not be happy, Maurice, to act in opposition to the patron. Do you remember sufficiently that the congregation of St. Mary's is a fluctuating one, and that for the actual needs of the district the accommodation is enough, but that so many from other parishes fill it."

"And am I to forbid their entrance, mother? Sir Stephen is equally opposed to the abolishing of the rents as to the enlargement of the church; he knows I would willingly trust to the offertory for my own sake, but he will not hear of such a measure, so what is left? No, mother, nothing but my resignation, or the voluntary subscription plan, which Mr. Roberts has so nobly set on foot, and which Sir Stephen is too proud to recognize or appreciate. Lady Legh's opinion is not to be trusted either; it strikes me she is

contenting herself to be a mere cypher in his hand. Why does she not, with all her leisure, help you a little? Why does she not fulfil some of the promise of her unmarried days? Even Mrs. Legh, with her sick husband, finds time to come to the school oftener, and is much more frequently at church."

"Ah, Maurice, you judge Millicent without mercy."

"Do I?" he said, taking the poker and banging a piece of coal till it cracked and blazed. "Do I? Well, she is young and pretty, and admired, and she has temptations to self-pleasing; but it is all very fine, mother, to be sweet and sympathizing, and gentle in manner—there must be something more. The Haydens have never seen her in their house since the time of the fever. Miss Strong, the straw bonnet architect, in Mill-lane, whose name suits her character so well, told me to-day she believed those poor people were put to dreadful shifts sometimes—the boy is more ailing than ever, and Susan, the girl, drooping from the effects of the fever, and they are afraid to go near Sidcote, for fear of taking the infection there. Three months is a pretty safe quarantine, to say nothing of five. Lady Legh said they were not

to have any communication with the house till it was thought prudent, on the child's account—he is made the excuse, at any rate."

"Maurice!"

"Well, mother."

"I believe Millicent incapable of making a false excuse." And the words had scarcely left her lips, when Annette announced Lady Legh.

"My dear, how glad I am to see you!" Mrs. Howard said, as Millicent came up to her sofa; while Mr. Howard rose, and coldly returned her greeting to him.

"I have just been to the station with my husband, and I stopped here on the way home, hoping I might find Mr. Howard."

Millicent's voice quivered, and sounded unlike its natural tones.

"Mr. Howard," she continued, "I find you have had an interview with Sir Stephen to-day; don't be angry with me if I ask you to let the question of the enlargement of the church rest for the present; I am quite, quite sure that Sir Stephen will move in it at last—but you must suppose that paragraph in the newspapers about Mr. Roberts's donation, must be disagreeable to him, and that he might naturally expect to be con-

sulted. I feel," she added—and now she was trembling on the brink of tears—"that you may think I have no right to interfere; but I could not help asking you not to demand from Sir Stephen as a right, what I believe he will gladly give as a pleasure."

"Lady Legh, I demand nothing; you have made a great mistake—as to interference, as you term it, I wish you interfered more—rather," he added, "I wish you influenced Sir Stephen more; but we need not pursue the subject further."

"Perhaps not," she replied with gentle dignity; "still as Mr. Roberts is a connexion of mine, and as the ostentatious way in which he has moved in this matter is doubly trying to me, since it annoys Sir Stephen, I should be so glad if you would not urge what is disagreeable to him—at least for a few months. Wait till Mr. Roberts's sincerity in making the offer is tested, and till Sir Stephen shall see for himself the need of a larger church for the people."

"That time is, I am afraid, far off, Lady Legh; but I shall make no effort to canvass for subscriptions; though, if they come unsought, I shall not refuse them, especially as the churchwardens agree entirely with me. But I have determined to wait, till such time as I see clearly

whether it is my duty to go on with the work here, or resign the incumbency of St. Mary's. I can have no doubt which course would suit Sir Stephen best."

"Maurice!" Mrs. Howard now interposed, "you have no ground for saying that of your earliest friend. Lady Legh's advice is wise, I think; a pause will be good for all, especially if it gives us time to seek guidance from His hand, who ever points the way of gentleness and considerate forbearance for the feelings, or even the prejudices of others."

"Yes, mother; but never at the sacrifice of duty; pure cowardice and fear of man often take a higher sounding name; we mistake our motives so much."

"And the motives of others, too, Maurice."

He did not answer; and soon after Millicent was gone.

It was the night of the "At Home" at Bella Vista, and Lady Legh shrank from encountering it, though, without giving positive offence, she could scarcely stay away. The dinner a week before had been escaped by a terrible fit of neuralgia, which had laid an iron grasp upon her, and actually kept her to her room on the day in question. Sir Stephen had peremptorily ordered

her to write an excuse, in a tone which could not be disputed. But the disappointment had been great to the Robertses, and Millicent's kind and loving nature always shrank from giving others pain; so to-night, although Sir Stephen was away—having carried out his intention of going to London on that very afternoon—his wife was determined to appear in her step-mother's drawing-room.

She looked very fair and sweet in her glistening white silk, and pearl ornaments, which had been reset according to her husband's taste; her hair simply dressed, and the lilies in it suggesting the comparison of their wearer to one of those lovely flowers, surrounded by a galaxy of gaudier blossoms.

For every one was at Bella Vista to whom the smallest excuse for sending a card could be discovered, and there was every shade of colour, and every diversity of coiffure, and every variety of manner and bearing. Clusters of shy people, who were honoured by the invitation, and herded together in by-ways, behind protecting tables or sofas. Groups of pushing people, who were jealous of Mr. Roberts's seeming prosperity, and talked loudly and laughed long at their own jokes. Condescending people, who were there only for reasons best known to themselves,

curiosity, the love of what is popularly called society, and the like, who were contented to eat Mr. Roberts's ice, and sit down to the magnificent supper, and sip his champagne, and yet were scarcely well-bred enough to hide from their hostess that they were quizzing the whole entertainment, and wondering how "such people" could afford it. And there were some simple, happy people there, as in every crowd, who, bearing about within them the "music of the everlasting chime," carried, too, without, a sunny pleasant atmosphere, which even the worldly feel when they breathe it. Amongst these was Lady Legh; forgetful of herself, she was thinking of others; and poor Mrs. Roberts could not but feel proud that that gracious, lovable woman — so womanly and so gentle; so firm, and yet so tender — called her mother! And leaving Mrs. Legh to lean back on a sofa, in a conspicuous part of the room, Millicent took up her position by her side, and moved with her as she moved amongst her guests, dropping pleasant and bright words amongst them with a quiet grace, peculiarly her own.

There was music from hired professionals, which necessitated an occasional hush in the murmur of conversation; and there was amateur singing and playing also.

Unmercifully Mrs. Legh and several others criticized, and whispered comments amongst themselves, which sometimes attracted the attention of those who were the object of it. Indeed, with her glass continually raised to her eye, in the blank supercilious stare with which she greeted some unfortunate people who fancied they had the pleasure of her acquaintance, or the few cold words with which she shortly answered the questions of others, — Florence Legh was as disagreeable, as women holding a certain position in society, and with a dash of vulgarity in their nature, do contrive to make themselves when it suits them. One poor lady, rebuffed and taken aback, retreated from the sofa with the remark to her sister, "She surely *must* know who I am, but she was always stuck up and proud, and so was her mother before her. The idea of saying her husband was pretty well, when I asked, but not quite able to come out of an evening; when every one knows he is a cripple for life—and what wits he had——"

"*Hush!*" from the sister, stopped the completion of the sentence. Millicent was standing near, and had heard it all. Like oil on the troubled water was the pleasant remark which directed Mrs. Henderson's thoughts from Mrs.

Legh and her rudeness, into a far more agreeable channel.

"Yes," was the verdict afterwards, "she is a perfect lady, and always was; she is as good as she is pretty too, and as true as she is good." A high meed of praise, which need not be disclaimed from the lowliest; and would that more women merited it, and could claim it for their own. Can anything be beautiful, or lovely, or lovable, which is not true? To all outward seeming it may be so sometimes; but the unreal shall be surely unmasked at last, and the fair vision fades and vanishes away, leaving behind for some faithful and tender hearts the blackness of darkness, or the life-long harvest of dust and ashes, where golden fruit and precious leaves were looked for and expected.

Lady Legh was led into supper by the proud and delighted host; and it was wonderful how her quiet calm dignity acted as a spell upon him, so that he almost forgot to be his loud bumptious self. The attempt he made to direct her attention to the heavy gilt cornice in the drawing-room—to the stamped leather of the walls—to the ponderous *épergne* in the middle of the table, was faint and weak. Somehow he could not boast to her, and he could have wondered at himself as

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The bright, simple-hearted little sister of two years ago, who in her pretty alpaca dress and brown straw hat, would ramble at her side in the woods and fields, and clap her hands in ecstasy at the sight of the primroses in spring, and fill her basket with blackberry clusters in autumn—had vanished; and a girl with the promise of great beauty, but in years fit only for the school-room, stood in her place—a girl of scarcely seventeen, launched into a sea of second-rate country society, laughing and talking with an air far too forward and self-confident, and accepting, nay, perhaps looking for Mr. Brooke's attention, with a consciousness that was an echo of Julia Roberts, as her dress was the precise copy of it. Millicent had watched her young sister with an almost maternal anxiety throughout the evening, and once the grave and sad expression in her eye stopped Ida half way in a silly speech, and gave her a pang as her better nature asserted itself. "How could she help her?" was Millicent's anxious thought—to speak seriously to her mother was, as she knew of old, lost labour. In all the turbulence of the two boys in days that were past, or in Ida's inattention to her lessons, reference to Mrs. Gardiner was as useless as Millicent felt sure that reference to Mrs. Roberts would now be.

She would then only reply, "Oh dear, Millicent, one must not expect too much; do, pray do as you like with the children, only don't be hard on them;" which in plain English meant, "Do anything to save me trouble."

But Millicent could not see Ida thus, without making some effort for her; and she determined to ask her to spend a month at Sidcote, when the Leghs were gone to Brighton—a scheme which was gathering strength every day—and which, in spite of all her good resolutions against inhospitality and want of sympathy, Millicent was looking forward to with a sense of unmistakable relief.

To be alone with Sir Stephen was, from the course events had taken, a rare and delightful treat; and it was only by a strong effort that Millicent could repress impatient murmurs when Florence was more than usually dictatorial and inharmonious.

Yet out of the enforced visit of the Leghs to Sidcote sprung up some happy moments for Millicent—moments when the restraint she imposed upon herself, and the struggle to be gentle and forgiving towards Mrs. Legh, brought with it the glowing sense of victory—of victory over that most stubborn of enemies, *self*. Then, with

the single aim of helping others ever before her, Millicent tried in the fire-light hour, she now regularly spent with the poor fretful invalid, Henry Legh—to scatter little seeds here and there, which seemed to her in an incomprehensible manner to be springing up and bearing fruit. The yellow-labelled novels were not Henry Legh's only reading now—books from Millicent's own store crept in amongst them—favourite bits were read and pointed out—and hymns which she said or sung in her low voice, soothed and comforted the prisoner. His mind was like a child's, and he caught eagerly at ideas as new, which are as an oft-told tale to many.

The journey from which he expected so much was delayed again and again; and it was not till the beginning of January that the arrangements began to take a definite form, and the day for departure was actually fixed. Through all these weeks Millicent had not been very strong, or fit for much exertion; and, in the eyes of some, who judged her with that hard earthly judgment, which we are all so prone to deliver about our neighbours, the story of her life would have been thus written:—"She has nothing to do, but to please herself; no anxieties, no troubles; a beautiful house, with every luxury; scarcely allowed

to put her foot to the ground; it is difficult to imagine what she does with herself; she is scarcely ever seen in Dunsford, except in her carriage; never goes amongst the poor; refused to take a stall at that bazaar for the new organ at Painswick church, though every one of any importance has promised to do so—and did not seem inclined to work for it either; refused, too, to be on the ladies' committee of several societies; one never sees her name on any list; then she gives so few parties, and really asks people to dinner to meet one, who are all very well, but not precisely what one expects to meet at Sidcote. She is very agreeable, no doubt, and pretty, and graceful, but so useless, and so self-indulgent, I am afraid."

This was the verdict of many people in general, and of Miss Berners in particular, who, failing in the establishment of the vehement friendship with Lady Legh which she had desired, revenged herself in opinions like these, of one whom she never cared to understand, or value for her own sake. But there is another record kept, high above these earthly ones, of which the world takes so much heed—and the letters of that book are gold, and the words shine like the light.

On those pages Millicent Legh's name was

written, and there, thank God, thousands and tens of thousands shall be found registered, of whom the world is not worthy—hidden and faithful ones, who shall be known of all men and angels, in that day when the book shall be opened, and the Owner thereof shall make up his jewels, to shine for ever like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

As in every town or village throughout the world, the stream of life went on in Dunsford and its neighbourhood, divided into its two great channels. Down one of them the rich and the prosperous and the glad at heart floated, to all outward seeming, gaily and easily; while along the other, there was ever a hard battle against the current, and many a struggle for dear life itself, so difficult do the poor find it to hold their heads above the water, and escape the shoals and quicksands by the way.

In Mill Lane, and in many and many a byway and alley of Dunsford and its suburbs, this struggle was going on; throughout November and December, fever had in some quarters raged fiercely, and in others lurked about in a low depressing form, which sapped the strength of the poor man to the very foundations, and sent many a weary one to his grave.

In the little parlour behind the shop, which served for a kitchen too, in winter, as *two* fires were a luxury Mrs. Hayden could not think of indulging in, a group was gathered by the table, where tea was neatly set out, in honour of Miss Strong's presence. A hot cake was browning its glazed surface before the fire.

"Well, Susie, child," Miss Strong was saying, "speak out, and let us hear of your visit to the grand house. What did my lady say for herself, and what did she say to you?"

"She said many things," said Susie, whose face was now pale and pinched, and who looked very unlike the rosy girl of a few months ago. She had only just returned from Sidcote, where, as soon as the Leghs had gone, Millicent summoned her. She was very tired, poor child, and could only repeat, "She said many things, she was so kind, Herbert."

"Ah," sighed Herbert, "I wish I had had your chance; but, never mind, drink your tea, Susie, before you talk," he added with a thoughtfulness and tenderness, which were very touching.

Mrs. Hayden, who had been summoned by the tinkling shop bell, to wait on a customer,

now returned, and Miss Strong began her tea in good earnest.

"Well, what excuse did my lady make for never looking near you all these many months,—sent you baskets of good things?" as Herbert interposed. "Of course she did. But I should like to know, Herbert Hayden, what that cost her; nothing, neither trouble nor expense, for she has servants enough to serve her now, and money enough to make the feeding of fifty sick people just nothing. No, it won't do—it won't do. I turned straw bonnets for her when she was a little maid, something like Susie there, and I have turned and cleaned 'em up to the time of her going away from Bridge Street, so I know her pretty ways and sweet voice, for one must needs talk to a customer about shapes and plaits, and the height of the crown, and so on; its my belief, Miss Millie is taken up with being my lady, and all her fine things, and——"

"You were never so far wrong in your life, Miss Strong," said Susie, kindling up till the roses came back into her pale cheeks. "Lady Legh told me, how Sir Stephen was not willing she should visit about while the fever was so bad, and had particularly forbidden her coming into Mill Lane. She told me, too, that Mrs. Henry

Legh was so afraid of infection for her little boy, and she had not liked to ask me or mother to go up there till they were gone away, especially as poor Mr. Legh was so hurt by a fall in the summer, he is never likely to be well again. They only left Sidcote yesterday, and she sent for me to go at once. But, mother," said Susie, "what would you say to my going to live at Sidcote, and be under Mrs. Bligh and Mrs. Turner; and, oh, mother, what would you say to you and Herbert going to the Lodge, at the West Gate—that lovely cottage, mother, near the church, where I could see you so often, and where Herbert could get well and strong, and we should have no more of this horrid little shop, and all its worries and troubles. Lady Legh told me the old lady who is now at that Lodge is going to leave it, and live with her son—who is one of the keepers—in the spring; and she says she feels sure if we would like the change, Sir Stephen would do as she says, and let us live there."

Herbert had been listening with feverish earnestness, and waited anxiously for his mother's answer. It was long in coming.

Miss Strong tapped her spoon sharply on the tea tray, and said, "Bravo! so my lady is of the right stuff, after all; and will wear like a good

Leghorn, and not fly into shivers at a touch like one of your trumpery paper chips. Come, Mrs. Hayden!"

Even then Mrs. Hayden did not speak directly, and when she did, it was slowly and deliberately. "I must think of it, my dear," she said at last. "I am doing here, what I have prayed to have time given me to do—saving money for a certain purpose, which an old and good friend, like Miss Strong, understands and knows about as well as we do. The shop is answering, thank God; and I hope I shall, in spite of all our illness, pay the first dividend to my husband's creditors next June. It's remarkable, that with the fever laying us all low by turns, the business should have prospered as it does; it looks as if God's blessing rested on us. We may think of her ladyship's offer to you, Susie; but Herbert and I must stay where we are. I could not hope to make anything like the same money, you know, by needlework, which would be the only employment left to me, if we lived at the Lodge. My only thought is for Herbert."

"It don't seem so," said Miss Strong; "stuff and fiddlesticks, Mrs. Hayden, about your husband's debts, as you call them—for, in my eyes, they are no debts at all. Was not everything

sold to pay the creditors, equal and just; and unless you had sold yourself, I don't see what more you could have done. Didn't even your handsome five-guinea Paisley shawl go, and that velvet mantle with the gimp trimming. Yes I call it stuff and nonsense; you have paid what you could; the thing is over and done with; and now you must look to your children's interests."

"You are very kind to us, Miss Strong," said Mrs. Hayden, gently, "and, I know, wish us well; but I am looking at my children's interests when I set myself, by God's help, to pay every farthing that their father owed to people who could ill afford to lose. I don't think so much of the debt to the Bank, though that must be cleared with the rest, if my life is spared; but there were several of the poor seedsmen, and the builder of the big warehouse, and two or three of the tradespeople who have suffered, by our means; they did not have what was just and right, and I must make it my first thought to labour and save, so that they have in the end what was theirs in the beginning. Herbert and I think alike."

The boy looked up at her with a wistful expression in his clear eyes. Visions of the pretty gable-roofed Lodge he had passed so

often in his wheel chair in other days, flitted before him, with the roses climbing up the porch, and the ivy twining round the chimneys; but mother and son did think alike. Mrs. Hayden was quite right.

Presently Herbert said, "We must stay here till all father's debts are paid—I know that." And he added, "I *wish* it to be so."

"Well, obstinate people must go their own ways," said Miss Strong, beginning to pull the folds of her comfortable green plaid shawl closer round her throat. "Obstinate people will go their own ways, and are best left alone. Supposing some folks who live in grand houses, and marry fine ladies were of your opinion, it might be the worse for Mrs. Gardiner that was, and all her young ones. Mr. Roberts's father's debts came to a pretty sum—or, according to you *are* a pretty sum at this moment. And here he is, building houses, yes, and churches too, and thought as much of as any man in Dunsford. What have you to say to that, Mrs. Hayden?"

"Nothing, Miss Strong,—nothing. It would ill become me to judge Mr. Roberts, or to talk about his concerns, as if I knew better than he. But I desire for my boys, that they may never have to lie down at night with the thought that

they owned a name which is not free from a shadow; and the name which has the word 'debt' hanging to it, has a shadow over it, and a dark one too. 'Owe no man anything,' is just a plain command, and I can't get away from it if I tried."

Miss Strong relinquished the controversy at last, with a choking feeling in her throat, and a strange desire to let the drops, which would gather in her eyes, fall down her cheeks. In her secret heart she applauded and admired Mrs. Hayden, and designs of helping her in what small way she could, rose up within her; but she was too strong-minded to indulge in such weakness, and baby waking from an impromptu nap he had taken at the foot of Herbert's couch, and clamouring for his tea, proved a welcome diversion for Miss Strong. She snatched him up and gave him several rough kisses, made him sit on her substantial knee, fed him with hot cake and bread and butter and sugar, and settled that she would make him a new straw hat for Sundays of the best plait in her store, and set Susan up with a bonnet when she went to the Hall. But Miss Strong was certainly a bit of a gossip, not more so, or as much, perhaps, as some in far more exalted positions, and she drew out from

Susan many particulars of the day she had spent at Sidcote.

Susan was rather melancholy at the way in which her great news had been received by her mother, but brightened up wonderfully as she went over the events of the day.

"I saw Lady Legh first in the housekeeper's room, she goes there every morning at eleven o'clock, and sees the people about the estate, if they have anything to say, any trouble to tell, or any advice to ask. There were several there to-day—the under-keeper's daughter, whose mother is ill; the coachman's wife, I think Mrs. Bligh said, whose baby died yesterday, and several more. Mrs. Bligh says her ladyship tells them to come, and once a week she reads to anyone in Mrs. Bligh's room, who likes to come, the servants and those connected with them. Mrs. Bligh said Sir Stephen was particular about her ladyship's going about too much, but——"

A warning glance from her mother stopped Susan; she knew what it meant—not to retail gossip about her superiors.

"I had dinner in the housekeeper's room, and was told to stay to tea too; but I thought you would want me, mother, so I came home. Lady Legh talked to me a long time in her own

sitting-room, and made me tell her everything about our illness; she seemed to have heard a great deal from Mr. Howard; but, oh! mother, it is so nice to talk to her, she listens with all her heart, and has such a quiet way with her, as Mrs. Bligh says," and this time Susan proceeded unchecked. "Her ladyship has a way with her, which makes you love her; you can't help it, it's like the sun shining right down upon you when she smiles. And all her questions are not just asked for the sake of asking; she *cares* to have your answer. Oh, mother! I *should* like to go and live near her always, if you can spare me, mother." And Mrs. Hayden answered, "I will think about it, Susan."

CHAPTER VIII.

IDA.

"We cannot be young twice; we cannot turn upon our steps, and go back to gather the garlands we left hanging on the trees ten years ago. And, therefore, with a gaze ever on the cross upon the distant hills, and a remembrance always of the shadow land that lies beyond, let us endeavour to be contented with the passing day of small things, and to make ourselves happy in the pleasantness of simple pleasures."

IN THE "SILVER AGE," BY HOLME LEE.

ON her return from the morning visit to Mrs. Bligh's room, a day or two after Ida's arrival, Millicent found her sister sitting over the fire, deep in the pages of a novel which had been left by Mrs. Legh, with a number of others, to be sent back to Mudie's in the box. Looking over Ida's shoulder, Millicent read the title.

"My dear child, that is not a nice book for you. I ought to have put it away."

"Oh yes, it is," was the reply; "it is so interesting. You needn't be afraid, Millie, Julia and I have read the others by the same woman;

let me finish it?" she said, detaining the book with a firm grasp.

"No, Ida; good stories are good things in their way; but even the best are not the right food for hungry minds at eleven o'clock in the morning. This is bad of its kind. I am sorry you have ever read it or its predecessors."

"Nonsense, Millicent; you forget I am grown up now; Julia says you treat me too much as if I were a child." Ida tried to pout, but ill humour was impossible to her gay frank nature.

"You are a child, Ida," Millicent said, laughing; "don't be so anxious to put on the years, which will come fast enough, and take you into your third ten before you know where you are."

"And then I shall be like that ridiculous Miss Berners, I suppose, or Auntie Juvenila, as the boys call Miss Roberts, amble about a room, and sit down upon a footstool, and pretend I am in the school-room."

But Lady Legh looked grave, as she took her work from the little table in its own especial window, and stopped her sister in an imitation of Miss Roberts's voice and manner, which was to the life, saying—

"I want you to be sensible for once, Ida; so get some work, and let us talk."

"Ah! but I have no work; I do so hate it. I will draw if you will let me, there is a sketch book and a pencil all ready. Now, Millicent, begin your lecture. I suppose Sir Stephen has been setting you up to it?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Oh! I saw him last evening glancing at me, and looking unutterable things, because I was laughing at something ridiculous Mr.—Mr. Albert Brooke said."

A great rosy flush overspread Ida's face, as she brought out the name with hesitation and difficulty. For all the teazing, and inuendos, and jests amongst the Robertses, about Mr. Brooke's admiration for Ida, had had their effect. Ida had winced at first, and felt the remarks painful than otherwise; but now she rather enjoyed them, and was inclined to be as pleased as Mr. Roberts undoubtedly was that the second son of the member for Dunsford was always running after her, and sending her flowers, and paying her marked attention wherever they met. "Good marriages run in the family," was Mr. Roberts's refined observation, and thus it was that Ida was rudely stirred from her unconscious and happy girlhood, and began to let her thoughts dwell on marriage in general, and on Mr. Albert Brooke

in particular. The mother who ought to have shielded her from this, was too feeble-minded to do so. Her natural refinement shrank from it sometimes, but she made no real effort to stem the torrent. It was pleasant to have Ida so well dressed, to see her admired; above all, to be assured sometimes that she looked like the sister of her pretty daughter.

So, a succession of parties, where the two girls, without any doubt, were the most attractive in the Dunsford coteries, did their work on Ida. She developed into much that was not to be admired in the eyes of right-thinking people; the child became the woman, and the sweet intermediate ground of maidenhood, with its purple shadows, and soft and tender awakenings—like the beautiful and gradual steps by which the young spring merges into the full glory of the summer—was lost. Ida Gardiner, like many another, missed it, and was never to know its sweetness.

It is surely a mistake, and is becoming a very common one, to let girls of sixteen go out into the world, and thus lose the freshness and simplicity of the morning of their days. In the higher ranks of society the rush is too suddenly made from masters and lessons—of every kind and genus—from plain, not to say

ugly dress, to balls and dinners, pic-nics and croquet; to trailing garments and marvellous bonnets of a morning, and very low, instead of very high, gowns of an evening. But in the class to which we refer, who do not taste the sweets of London life—who technically call all their society "quiet"—do we not often see girls like Ida Gardiner following their mothers into crowded drawing-rooms, shy and *gauche*, or self-confident and bold, at an age when they ought to be at home, learning to shine there, and be happy there, in all the fresh joyousness and brightness of youth, rather than to be so early initiated in all the ins and outs of what their mothers call "quiet country society"? Soon enough the children leave us, and in their place tired men and weary women stand. Why should we wish to bring this change about before its time? Why let the sweet innocence of early years scorch and wither in the heat of the noon-day sun, when the bud is scarcely half opened, and the dew is yet on the blossom?

As Ida pronounced the name which called the flush to her face, she bent lower over her drawing. Millicent knew when it was wise to refrain even from good words, and forbore to press the subject; but she led back to reminiscences of childhood, of Georgie and Esdaile, of scrambles in Sidcote

Park, and of an awkward meeting with Sir Stephen Legh there one day, when Millicent's gown had caught in the brambles, and was torn in every direction, while the lips and fingers of the whole party were dyed with blackberries.

"Happy old days," Ida said; "dear old days;" and then her voice broke down, and she came to her sister's side, and kneeling down by her, began to weep like a child wanting comfort. "I have two sides to me, Millicent; I feel like two different people. Oh! I wish I were like you; but I never shall be—I am turning into a Roberts now. I am stuck up and vulgar, and I learn to talk and giggle, and, oh, Millicent! I play off absurd airs sometimes—pretend not to know girls that I do know. Did you see me last night? I know you did. Was it not horrid of me?"

"See what, Ida?"

"Why, when that poor little Mary Evans, Mrs. Lennard's niece, came dancing up to me after dinner, I thought she was so badly dressed, and her hair such a fright, I did not want Mr. Brooke to think we were great friends; yet, you know, Millicent, we used to be, and I like her ten times better now than half the silly girls I meet; but I shirk her whenever I can, and spoke to her

last night as much as to say times were changed now. There!" said Ida, with a gasp, "you had no idea what I was before, had you?"

"Oh yes, Ida, I see it all, and have seen it for a long time. Last evening I saw poor little Mary Evans's look of disappointment, and I could almost fancy the tears were in her eyes. I saw, too, the evident pleasure you showed in Mr. Brooke's attentions; and yet, how you laughed and chattered with Mr. Vere—my cousin—so that I cannot wonder Sir Stephen looked grave, or that others looked grave also."

"Millicent, you have the quietest way of saying the most dreadful things; if anyone else talked to me so I should fly off into a rage, but *you* love me, so I can take it from you; and besides, you yourself are all you want me to be. I'll try to improve, Millicent," she added, humbly, "help me; but, living with those Robertses, how can I?"

"My dear child, there is precisely the same element in many another family; don't be unjust and hard upon the Robertses, or on anyone else. Very often we see great want of tact and courtesy, and good manners, in those who occupy a very different position in society. But, Ida, there is only one cure for all these infirmities and weaknesses, to which human nature leans so easily.

A true Christian, who is always trying to think what will please his Master, forgets self so much, that he pleases those around him by countless deeds of kindness and gentle courtesy. The world is but too prone to be cold, and harsh, and heartless; but if we strive to guide our lives by His rule who prayed, not that his own should be taken out of the world, but kept from the evil in it, we possess the secret of being in the highest sense gentlewomen, whether we live in palaces or cottages, or wear cotton or silk dresses."

"Yes, I know it all," said Ida, "but I don't feel it—it is so difficult to be good; and then, when people talk about religion, like Mrs.——"

"Hush, Ida; dont let us talk about others, or judge them, only about ourselves. You are going to stay here a month, shall I take you in hand, and advise you what to do? We will go down to Mrs. Howard's after luncheon, and beg for some books, and we will try to read together every morning, and you shall have my sitting-room; and when I see my poor people, or Sir Stephen wants me, you can be there, and begin the day with something better than those novels."

"Very well, I shall like it—only Millicent—"

Ida seemed to be struggling to get out something that oppressed her.

"Only what?"

"If I were to be married now I am young, it would be a good thing, I think; it would take me away from Bella Vista, where we live in a sham; trying to be grand, and copying fresh fashions from some fresh pattern every week; if I married ——"

But the close of the sentence was cut short by Mr. Vere's appearance. He had been riding with Sir Stephen, and was going away after luncheon. Ida sprang to her feet, and he scarcely caught a glimpse of her tear-stained face, as she ran away, free and childish in her movements once more, and forgetting the stately swing and forced dignity which she had decided was becoming to her.

Mr. Vere settled himself in a chair before the fire, and folding his hands behind his head, remarked, "Is it *un fait accompli* with that little sister of yours, and the stripling son of the member for Dunsford, who is waiting for a commission in the Artillery, I hear?"

"No, indeed," Millicent answered; "why do you think so?"

"Well, it looks like it—that is all. By the by, I have heard from my brother; he and his

wife will be in England this summer; then I hope you and I shall meet at Broughton; you must, upon my word, see the picture of Aunt Millicent. You are even more like it than you were when I saw you first. I was down at the old place just before Christmas. Since Guy has lived abroad, I have gone sometimes to hear the housekeeper grumble, to marvel at the rank grass on the lawn, and to wish I were a youngster frisking about there in the sun again; but the Veres are an unlucky lot. Guy will never be a strong man, and has no child to come after him. As to me——"

He laughed a bitter laugh, sad to hear. Millicent was surprised, for the evening before, Mr. Vere had been full of wit and gaiety, and the life of the whole party.

"Have you been ill," she asked, "since you were here in the summer?"

"I am always ill," was the answer. "Not worse than usual. Ill at ease, I mean—sick to death of all the humbug that stalks about the world; and jealous when I see happy people like you. I wish you would give me the receipt. Standing in a roaring, raging storm, as you did, last June, when most women would have screamed and made a pretty piece of

work; standing serene and quiet, though you had good cause to be afraid. It is enough to make a man marvel when he sees a woman—— but," breaking off, "it is not in my line to talk like this. I don't know what ails me to-day. You will be as tired of me as I am of myself."

"No, indeed; I do wish, oh! so much, that you could take hold of the only satisfying thing in the world."

"I shall never be religious, if that's what you mean. Good gracious, Lady Legh, do I not see enough to make me shudder, with your so-called religious people. The women flirting and back-biting one minute, and off to daily prayers or meetings the next. Dancing the night away at one time, and going off to church by day-break at another. Do you mean to say there is anything real in religion like that? Those people, too, who profess to believe so much, and talk in such familiar terms of the 'Unseen,' and run on about altar cloths, and processional hymns, and surpliced choirs, and parsons who hang crosses to their backs; or others of different genus, who give away little tracts, and go to prayer-meetings and religious meetings, and whine about the wickedness of the world, while they are to the full as worldly as the rest. I say these people don't

seem a bit better or happier than a fellow like me, who goes about with a grin on his face, and makes fun of every thing, because he does not pretend to believe in any thing, except in a mere general way of course, which will do well enough in the end."

Millicent found this hard confession of the clever man of the world far more trying to meet with calmness than Ida's had been. Tears filled her eyes, and as she looked at Mr. Vere, the sad, pitying expression touched him as no words could have done. She was feeling in her heart how true a great deal that he said was; she was feeling, as every faithful Christian does feel at times, that those whose voices call "Lord, Lord," and in works deny Him, are far more grievously his enemies than those who openly avow (and how few these are) that they will have none of his counsels. The silence which followed was broken by Mr. Vere rising abruptly.

"Well, this is my third visit here, and I have to thank you and Sir Stephen for a kind reception; and I have to thank you, too, for showing me that it is possible to be good, and true, and attractive, and I would say religious into the bargain, only I hate the word. Now," he added in his old tone, and smiling that curious smile of

his, "I must go and look after a letter I have to read and answer; there is still half an hour before luncheon."

But Millicent said, "Stay one minute. I want to ask you to be more lenient in your judgment of others. Some are carried on with the great current of the world, who have within the real Trust and Hope, which you say you know nothing of. The requirements of rank and position are often heavily felt and mourned over by these, and they are led away, they scarcely know how. Be tender to them, and do think of yourself." The acute lawyer winced a little. He did not expect Millicent's reply would be of this kind. "You said," she went on, "a general sort of belief would do well enough in the end; oh! it is then that it utterly fails. We are all standing alone in God's sight; we are indeed," she repeated, for he gave a little impatient shrug of his shoulders. "I dare say your mother taught you many things when you ran about on the lawn at Broughton, in the sunshine; go back to that time, and ask to be made simple and humble, and believe all that God says, as you believed your mother then. In the hour of death—the end which you mean, I suppose—the simple faith of the child will grasp the staff in that dark valley,

while the strong man, in all the pride of his boasted intellect, may feel for it in vain."

She spoke, as she always did, simply and naturally, hesitating a little from a womanly dread of saying too much or going too far. But though the same words would have called forth a cutting and sarcastic repartee from any one else, Lancelot Vere received them from his cousin, whom he believed to be true and real, with an air of respect greater than that which courtesy often compelled him to assume when the judge checked him in court, if the point of law, for which he might be eloquently pleading, was pressed too far. He listened and bowed his head, but said not a word, and left the room.

A seed cast into the ground, bread thrown upon the waters, Millicent shall one day know that according to her faith it was given her, as a prayer was sent up for the kinsman of her mother's house, that he might find Him who alone is sufficient for us in all time of our wealth, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

The question as to Mr. Brooke's intention about Ida, was sooner settled than Millicent or anyone else had anticipated. The proposal was made in form to her mother and Mr. Roberts,

and was received by the latter with unqualified satisfaction, by the former with a sort of gratified vanity, mingled with half-expressed fear that Ida was too young, and that Millicent was sure to think so. Most decidedly Millicent did think so, and being consulted and begged to express herself freely, she did not fail to do it.

"If Ida were engaged to any man much older than herself, who could have weight with her, and influence her," she said, as Mrs. Roberts leaned back in the chair she scarcely ever left but for her carriage, "it would be different; but to a precocious boy, scarcely of age, who, after hesitating what he should do for years, is now going to loiter away his time in a crack regiment. I do think that it is a great pity that affairs were allowed to go so far."

"Now really Millicent that is most unkind; how could I help it? and you don't seem to consider what a good family the Brookes's is, and the advantages in that way. I should have thought," she went on with a little ill humour, "you would have been glad to have your sister married away from people like us—for Sir Stephen's sake, who makes it tolerably evident that he will not have more to do with us than he can help. But I suppose having married so well

yourself, you don't care what becomes of poor Ida."

Millicent long ago had learned never to enter the lists with Mrs. Roberts, so she only said, "Of course as you asked me to come here and talk over the matter, I was constrained to do so; but my dear mother, if you are satisfied, that is the principal thing; at any rate, Ida is only bound to obey your wishes. Mr. Brooke is, I know, the second son of a good family, but I cannot think his antecedents are quite what we might wish. Then his father and mother——"

"Ah, what do they say?" Mrs. Roberts asked eagerly.

Millicent hesitated. A day or two before she had had a long and disagreeable *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Brooke, when that lady had dwelt a great deal on the trap Mr. Roberts had set for her son, the countless times he had been asked to dinner, and how Albert was so sociably inclined, he never could resist such people; the only cause of thankfulness to the anxious mother being that the lot had fallen on "Ida, who, as every one knows, is a lady by birth, and not on that terrible Julia!" Mrs. Brooke had, moreover, summed up by saying that Albert's regiment would soon be ordered off to India, that a marriage now was impossible,

and that in three years much might happen! To repeat all this and much more to Mrs. Roberts was simply impossible, so on being pressed Millicent could only say that the Brookes thought Albert far too young to marry, and that his mother had talked over the whole matter very much as a worldly woman would be sure to do, saying some sensible things and some very foolish ones, and hoping the thing would be left in abeyance.

But such was not to be the case; the engagement was announced in Dunsford. The Robertses gave a dinner party in honour of it, and Mr. Roberts felt himself a greater man every day. Indeed with that sort of irresistible force which money gives, and the fact that he would be connected by marriage with two of the best families in the neighbourhood, Mr. Roberts's star was in the ascendant; "his dinners were really so first rate, and his wife quite a gentlewoman, and the rest were very good-natured." And so the Dunsford people argued themselves into the belief that it was, after all, as well to keep up with the Robertses.

Ida herself, in all the flutter and excitement of her new position, found her only true friend in her gentle, loving, sister. She loved Albert

Brooke—at least she thought so, poor child—and at seventeen devotion and admiration such as he lavished on her, and presents of every form and kind—which made grave inroads on his allowance—could not fail to make her think him everything that was delightful.

Mr. Brooke was simply a young man we meet every day, moderately handsome and moderately gentlemanlike, and not too clever, who was silent about a year at Oxford, and avoided any reference to his reason for choosing the army as his profession late in the day. He was intensely conceited, and, with all his love for Ida, had a sort of patronizing air about him, which Millicent disliked. He was very much addicted to gossip and large talk, of the distinguished people he knew, and the intimate terms he was on with those who had titles to their names. He read nothing, and was consequently, though a fluent talker, a very superficial one; still he was good-tempered, and sincere in the love he professed for Ida, which indeed had cost him a pretty hard battle at Brooklands, and to which he stood firm. The question of religious principles was never raised by any one but by Millicent, and Ida's answers to her inquiries were evasive and unsatisfactory, winding up with, "He is a great deal better than

I am, Millicent, a hundred times. No man likes to talk about those things, you know."

"No, not to *talk*, perhaps, Ida; but to rule our every day life by the highest authority, is the only safeguard for either man or woman. I am afraid for you, Ida, sometimes; life is a serious and grave reality; health, and youth, and strength may fail, and if we have not given them to God, and tried to use them for Him, it is fearful to look forward to earthly changes, and sorrows, and trials, and to feel, when they come upon us, we shall have to begin to seek the only help in trouble."

"Mamma says you are older than she is in many things," Ida said one day. "You are not a bit like a girl just married, with everything your heart can wish, you are so dreadfully——" grave and serious, Ida meant to say, but the sunny smile which broke on her sister's face seemed to contradict such an assertion; "well, I mean dreadfully *good*," she went on; "only please don't foretell that I shall be unhappy, for I mean to be very happy indeed. If only those three years were gone, and he was safe home again. But I mean to be so wise all that time, and educate myself. Now, Millicent, you approve that, don't you?"

Millicent's answer was, "Yes; and I will help you all I can," and then a rapturous hug from her sister, so full of confidence and hope, and the gladness of young life and joy, ended the conversation.

Spring came, with all its opening buds and re-awakening flowers. Tender voices were heard among the trees in Sidcote park, as the breezes whispered to them that the winter was over, and the time of singing birds drew near. The annual miracle, like unto the blossoming of Aaron's rod, was once more repeated on the boughs and branches of every graceful lime and stalwart elm; and the children's voices were heard in the meadows, with a note of spring music in the tone, as they bore away to their homes in Dunsford big bunches of closely packed primroses, with here and there a purple orchis glowing in the midst.

In the Vicarage of St. Mary's, and in the Hall, its near neighbour, the depths of feelings were stirred. In the Vicarage, the great cloud of anxiety and dread had only just rolled away from Mrs. Howard's horizon; and even now, a dull grey calm has succeeded to the storm, which was only a relief by comparison, with what had gone before! Maurice Howard had been stricken

down by the worst form of the fever, which had been so prevalent in the neighbourhood throughout the winter. For many days the ravings of incoherent delirium was the only sound which his mother, lying on her couch, in the room opening from his, could hear—delirium, which in its wailing melancholy monotone, or in its fierce and resistless flood, sent pangs almost unendurable to the mother's heart. "Thou knowest that I love Thee" was the burden of the strain, and then the spirit seemed to question with itself, and reason, and condemn: "I love Thee! Thou knowest that I love Thee; but why, then, am I so hard and so unloving to others? So hard! so hard! that is what she said. Yes, I am hard; and so I have often failed to win." It was to strains like this that Mrs. Howard for many a sad day had had to listen, with an almost breaking heart. Then came the weary time when the doctors entered softly and stayed long—when she who loved him so, was powerless to minister by his pillow; who could only have her couch drawn within sight of the pale death-like face, and watching the movement of the nurses who took the part she ached to fulfil, could only lie still and pray. Ah me! it needed faith and trust—and they were given.

But at last, on this lovely spring day—this blessed Eastertide of the earth, as of the Church, there was a change. "He will live now," the doctors said; and then they knew how great the pressure had been on the calm and gentle woman, the desire of whose eyes had been so nearly taken from her; for, as she heard the words of hope, all consciousness left her, and it was long before she was restored to a remembrance of what had passed; then, as it all flashed back on her, an added cause of thankfulness was given—if addition could be made at such a time—the doctor bending over her said,

"Come, Mrs. Howard, take some more wine; you ought to drink the health of Sir Stephen Legh's son and heir."

Yes; that same April morning joy had come to Millicent—joy in a form, so fair and pure, that she thought she had never known before what it meant. There she lay, after a sweet untroubled sleep, with hope and love centering on the little baby, muffled in its folds of flannel, a priceless treasure, which was half shyly and very proudly held to her by her husband for a kiss.

In the year that had gone by, there had been times when Millicent had felt that somehow between herself and the husband she loved so well, lay an

almost undefined gulf. It was not that he failed in every loving observance—it was rather that these encumbered and restrained her. There were so many things he did not like her to do; so many doubts and fears encompassing her, that what she did might not meet his approval. But now, here was a bridge over the gulf, which might otherwise have widened. Surely the kiss which she felt upon her forehead, as Sir Stephen held the baby's soft cheek to nestle against his mother's—surely that kiss was a pledge of fuller sympathy, and a more common aim in the days that were to come.

"Thank you for my little son, darling," he whispered, and his eyes were dim with tears of love and tenderness; while she responded, "Thank God! thank God!"

There is no era more full of bliss in a true woman's life, than that in which the beauty of motherhood dawns first upon her soul; and there is no time when all outward things seem more in union with the inner self, which lies deep hidden from common eyes, than spring, the glad awakening spring. The waves of this troublesome world on which the little bark is launched look distant and far away; the spring sunshine lies on calm still waters, and all fears for the future are

lulled to rest. Messages from the haven of peace are brought by angel voices to the young mother's soul—soft words of love and tenderness, fresh and new in their meaning now. A little child is hers now! her own! a little child to bring to the loving Friend, whose Arms outstretch to receive it, when the sign of his adoption shall be marked upon its forehead. Thoughts of the battle-field of which that sign is the pledge, come not in those early days, to disturb the serenity of the mother in all her new-found happiness. There is no room for doubts or fears as yet—perfect and complete is the joy which He who made the mother's heart has Himself declared to be so great that in it is lost all memory of past sorrow; yes, and for the time, all foretaste of future care.

Happy Millicent! hers was a nature simple, loving, and refined in all its perceptions, to whom it was given to taste this cup of earthly bliss to the full. There seemed no shadow over her or it. The baby was strong, and flourished as well as heart could wish; the mother had no drawback to her recovery, but lay serenely happy, almost unwilling to hasten the day when she should return to the stream of busy life again, so delightful it was to have her husband hovering near, bringing her flowers, and reading to her

the letters of congratulation which came showering in upon them; though Millicent's tender heart almost reproached itself for its entire contentment, when one of them was read. She saw Sir Stephen hesitate to do so, and the sheet of thin foreign paper was half returned to the envelope.

"From the Leghs, at last," he said; "poor Florence is not so hopeful as to the effect of the Kissingen waters on Henry, as she was. Do you care to hear it read, dearest?"

"Oh yes; poor Florence! what does she say?"

"Apologies for delay in writing," said Sir Stephen, running over the opening sentence, and glancing at the date; "delighted to hear the good news of the son and heir."

Strange, how little the significance of these words struck the happy mother.

"People's lot in life were indeed widely different," the letter went on; "Millicent walked in the sunshine, while Florence was in the gloom. It was hard to see the reason of these things, for such a life was before her that she sometimes shrank from the thought of encountering it."

"Oh, poor Florence!" Millicent interrupted. "Little Stephen was well—poor little boy;

his future could not be a very brilliant one." But then came a long history of the child's perfections and wonderful precocity, and what every one had said of him, from the Marchioness of Wasteland, to the chaplain's wife at Kissingen. So Florence hoped he would fight his way, as well as his baby-cousin, to whom God had been so lavish in His gifts."

"What is the little man's name to be?" was the concluding question. "I hope not Stephen. I feel as if there could only be one little Stephen Legh in the world."

The letter was put aside, and no remark was made on it. Sir Stephen was, perhaps, more alive to the bitter jealousy which ran like a dark thread through it, than Millicent was.

"Baby's names!" yes, that was the only point which must be now discussed. It was certain that Stephen must be one, and Millicent suggested that that of her husband's dead brother should be the other.

So Randolph Stephen was baptized in St. Mary's church on the first anniversary of the bright May day which had seen Millicent come to Sidcote as its mistress.

This baptism was Maurice Howard's first public act after his illness; and the same evening

he wrote with trembling hand a letter expressing his wish to resign the incumbency of St. Mary's; as the doctors forbade him to take any duty for some time, and advised him to spend the next winter abroad.

"It will be for the best," was Sir Stephen's comment; and Millicent, who was haunted by his almost spectral appearance, and the broken tones of the voice, once so firm and strong, felt the words strike like ice to her heart.

"Yes, it will be for the best," he repeated. "It is not possible that a man like Mr. Howard could go on with me here without the differences of opinion which are so distasteful to us both, Millicent; it is much better that it should be so. I must communicate with the bishop at once."

"But his mother, Stephen; what will she do? She cannot go with him. Cannot you suggest that he should get the bishop's leave to be absent for a year or two; and then if his health is restored he could come back."

"I think not. Remember, Millicent, the proposition to resign comes from Mr. Howard; why should I interfere?"

"Why? oh! think how devoted he has been—how earnest and hard-working; think how ill and shattered he looks; think of his mother."

"My dear child," Sir Stephen said, "you are pleading the very reasons for Mr. Howard's going away, not for his remaining. He and I have unfortunately something antagonistic in our natures; in other words, he likes to rule, and so do I. He will be much happier elsewhere, and I shall feel relieved; the church won't be so crowded with the wanderers from Dunsford; but the people of the district, and my tenants also, will reap an advantage there. Now, surely that is plain speaking enough; let us say no more."

So Millicent was often silenced; but to-night tears sprang to her eyes as she asked,

"Who will be the successor at St. Mary's?"

"Ah! that is a matter for future consideration. I daresay many will be ready to step into the Vicarage. The Howards will scarcely take away their furniture, I should think, but sell it to the new incumbent."

"I can't imagine how you can talk so coolly about it, Stephen—I can't indeed!" and Millicent's tears could not be restrained.

"You are over-tired to-night, I think," was Sir Stephen's calm reply; "it has been a fatiguing day to you, and little Randolph, though he doesn't know it. How well he behaved himself at his baptism."

And so he won her away from the question of Mr. Howard, to talk of their child, and Millicent responded.

So it always was; she never felt that she could cry out any passing trouble or vexation on her husband's breast. It was his way always—it had been from the beginning, to waive any subject on which they disagreed. Perhaps it was that he felt his gentle wife's superiority in many things, and dreaded to come to the point of confessing it—and so losing his place as her ideal of all that was great and good! But whatever the reason might be, the fact existed, and Millicent knew that it was so.

During the few weeks that Mr. Howard remained at the Vicarage, he seemed to make no way towards recovery. His step was feeble and slow, his large expressive eyes burned with unnatural brilliancy, and his voice was low and weak. Clearly he was unfit to remain at St. Mary's, and the paragraph in the "Dunsford Star" was strictly true. "We state, with great regret, that the respected incumbent of St. Mary's, Sidcote, has resigned the living from enfeebled health. His loss will, we are sure, be much felt, both by the esteemed patron of the church, and by many others who have benefited by his

ministry and pastoral care. Mr. Howard, we believe, intends wintering, by the advice of his medical men, in the South of France. Mr. Kennedy, who has been officiating at St. Mary's during the illness of the present incumbent, is named as his successor."

"You will write often to me," Millicent said, as she sat in the old familiar place by Mrs. Howard's couch for the last time. "You will write to me."

"Yes, darling, I will; the question as to my power of undertaking the journey, however strong my will may be, is yet undecided; but we shall see how I get through our first move to Bournemouth. We can pause there, and wait for the guiding hand. And you will write to me, Millicent, my heart tells me it will not be 'out of sight out of mind' with you."

"Oh no, no! I owe you and Mr. Howard what no tongue can tell. It seems very hard to lose you; but I suppose it is—it must be—right and best."

"Yes, darling—yes. I have misgivings that Maurice will never be well again, and that the need for the winter abroad may never come. But I have been learning to lay down my will at his feet, who once gave back an only son to his

mother, and she was a widow. Perhaps it may yet be his good pleasure—we cannot tell—that he should close my eyes, and minister at my dying pillow, as he has watched by my sick couch so long, and so tenderly. Remember, Millicent, that if he was—as I know he seemed—sometimes hard in his judgment of others, sometimes failing in loving forbearance and gentleness, he has never failed to me, he has been husband, and friend, and son, through all the weary years of my widowhood. We have bid Sir Stephen good-bye," she went on; "he came this morning."

"Yes, I know," Millicent said; "I should like to see Mr. Howard, too."

He came in soon, and the parting was short.

"May God bless you and the child," were his last words, and the pale face, still so keen and eager in its expression, rested in Lady Legh's memory for many a day; "and give us all, to me especially, a more humble and childlike spirit. May God bless you and the child," he repeated, solemnly, "and Sir Stephen Legh," he added, as he felt the last lingering pressure of the small hand in his, the hand of his patron's young wife.

So the Howards left the vicarage, and Mr.

Roberts's hundred pounds was not claimed, nor the tens and fives which some others had promised towards the work of enlarging the church; and the successor proved to be the same Mr. Kennedy whom the "Dunsford Star" had predicted would be the man. He took the furniture at a valuation, and filled the Vicarage with a crew of turbulent little children, headed by their gay spirited mother, who loved the bustle and rattle of life, and electrified many of the quieter sort by her blythe activity. She never ceased to rejoice in that happy day, when, by the merest chance (as she said), while taking temporary duty at Seaford, "Walter had heard of the illness of Mr. Howard, and how someone was wanted to fill the gap immediately. It had all turned out as she expected. Walter was the very man to have St. Mary's, and Sir Stephen Legh was quite charmed with him; but Walter was certain to get on wherever he was. Then the bishop had written the same Walter such a nice letter; it was all delightful." So Mrs. Kennedy went on smiling and radiant, ignoring care or anxiety, giving little parties, and going to as many as lay in her power, while her children tumbled about in the nursery or garden, and ran wild over the house; while the district, with all its little, well-organized

machinery, was left to take care of itself, far more than when the mother of the last incumbent lay bound by a life-long sickness to her couch.

Mr. Kennedy was plain, prosaic, and good-tempered, his cares sat lightly upon him, he preached very good sermons, and visited the poor, and looked after the schools as a matter of duty—a duty which, provided it did not seriously interfere with personal enjoyment, he found rather agreeable than otherwise.

He had an open cheerful manner, and the first impression he made on the Dunsford people was a favourable one.

"But who would go to him in trouble, I should like to know?" Miss Strong asked, with a doubtful shake of her straw bonnet. "No; he and his lady look too much as if the world went easy with them. It is not to my notions to call a parson away from knocking about those crotchet balls to a death bed, Mrs. Hayden."

"Croquet balls you mean, Miss Strong," Herbert ventured to correct.

"Crotchet or croquet, it is all one. It may be all very well for the young and frolicsome, that must be hitting something: better the balls

than their neighbours, you know; but when I pass along by the vicarage and see 'em there through the evergreens flittering about and tapping those balls, the parson laughing and chattering with the rest, I say to myself, 'No, if I'm on my dying bed, I ain't the one to send to him from his crotchet to talk to me! Now, of the one that's gone," said Miss Strong, her voice softening, and the hard lines in her face looking less deeply furrowed; "of him, one may say he was always at his work; morning, noon, and night he was *ready*. And if he was a bit hard on the gentry sometimes, and had a roughish manner when he spoke of pleasing self, wasn't he like an infant in his gentleness when the poor and the friendless were in trouble. Haven't we all seen him in this very room the night baby was so bad with the fever, Mrs. Hayden, and but little hopes of Herbert there, wasn't it like the voice of an angel when he knelt and prayed for the lamb of the fold. There, I can't go on. I always shall be a fool when I talk of him," and Miss Strong grasped her cotton umbrella, and was gone before those who listened could rejoin.

Mrs. Hayden sat down to her work of mending baby's frock, with a sigh, as she con-

firmed from her heart Miss Strong's praise. He was always at his work, and always ready. "It will be the same when his Master comes," she thought; "sometimes I think that time is not far off. When the Master comes and calls for him he will be ready."

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHILDREN OF SIDCOTE.

"Heigh ho! daisies and buttercups;
Fair yellow daffodils stately and tall;
A sunshiny world, full of laughter and leisure;
And fresh hearts unconscious of sorrow and thrall:
Send down on their pleasure smiles passing its measure,
God that is over us all!"

JEAN INGELOW.

NOTHING impresses upon us the swift passing away of time so greatly as the changes which four or five years work in those we know, and see, perhaps, only at intervals—or, seeing, scarcely notice, till some circumstance arises which forces the contrast between past and present upon us. The baby of but yesterday, as it seems to us, is a great noisy boy in knickerbockers; the pretty child of seven or eight years old, is a tall ungainly girl; the shy blushing maiden, the self-possessed wife and tender mother. In the calm, and as we tell ourselves, the stationary era of

middle-life, these changes are less perceptible—we see in others what we fail to notice in ourselves; and, indeed, five years spent on the table-land which we cross, before we begin to go down into the valley, are very different in their effects, to what they are, when added to the rosy freshness of childhood and of early youth, or the failing infirmity of old age.

The lawn at Sidcote looks the same as on the evening five years before, when Millicent Legh came home a bride. The trees in the park wear the same emerald beauty in spring's soft hours; the slopes and glades hide the same treasures for children's busy fingers—the graceful deodaras are somewhat, but not very perceptibly increased in height. The wealth of creeping plants is, it may be, a little greater than of old, and around the windows of Lady Legh's room the banksia rose and westeria have clustered more thickly.

At this window she is seated now, and from it she looks out upon the lawn, where a group is gathered, which interests her as no other can. There the four children are at play. Her own stalwart, rosy Randolph is kicking about a large india-rubber ball, with a strength which his cousin, little Stephen Legh, vainly tries to emulate; while Randolph's twin sisters Evelyn

and Elsie shout with laughter, as Stephen, in an effort to seize the ball, trips at last, and falls headlong on the soft turf. Stephen is more than two years older than Randolph, but not very much bigger, and like many only children he is a baby, because no other baby has ever supplanted him. He falls now, with a cry which brings his mother from a seat where she is sitting with Ida Gardiner, to the rescue.

"He's such a rough boy!" Millicent hears Stephen say, as his mother raises him, and anxiously asks where he is hurt; while Randolph kicks away at the ball, and Evelyn and Elsie toddle after him—and soon they all fall together in a heap, laughing in their happy innocent mirth.

But Millicent leaves the window now, and, taking her hat, goes downstairs, and out into the garden. As she moves across the lawn to the spot where Florence Legh is comforting Stephen, we may notice one of those changes which five years may bring in youth. Matronly grace and dignity are in every movement and gesture, while her sweet serious face has an expression hovering over it which was not there before.

"Is he hurt, Florence?" she asks—and the voice, too, is changed—more subdued in its tones

—less ringing and less glad. "Is little Stephen hurt?"

"Really I can't tell, Millicent; but I do think some one will be dreadfully injured one day, if Randolph's spirit is not checked. Look at Ida's dress; that was torn just now by his boisterous play. Come, darling, let us go and find Banks, and get her to bathe his head with eau de cologne."

Millicent stood for a moment watching Florence's train of black silk and crape sweep the lawn, as she and the boy crossed it together. Then she turned to Ida.

"Did Randolph tear your gown, dear?"

"Yes; but who cares? It was my fault as much as his, Millicent; how *can* you take all her impertinence so coolly. That little dressed-up whining child is the real teaze wherever he goes; not jolly little Randolph. But do you know Mr. Roberts is closeted with Sir Stephen? I drove here with him an hour ago; and one would think mamma must be ill, by his face; or the red brick factory burned down, or something like that; something is amiss I am sure, though I couldn't make out what. However," said Ida listlessly, "some change at Bella Vista will be a mercy, even if it is for the worse. Since Esdaile

went to sea, and Georgie and that intolerable Curtis have made such an alliance, the life we lead is a delightful one. Julia and I are anything but like turtle doves, and poor dear mamma and Miss Roberts' sham fight never ceases; while all the time we are pretending to be grander and grander, and the worthy head of the house will die of the complaint of the frog in the fable. Everything is irritating, and every one provoking but you, Millicent, except when you provoke me by serenity and those lectures, which I want to be angry at, only I can't manage it. Leave the twins and Randolph to Susan Hayden for once, and let me have a good grumble."

Millicent seated herself in the place Florence had left, and said, "You don't look as miserable as you wish me to believe."

"Ah, that's all very fine; but I am. Another mail has come in, and no letter. Of course *he* is up the country, or down the country; of course there are fifty reasons which he will give in his next epistle; but, Millicent, the truth is that Albert Brooke is tired of me, and hasn't courage to say so. If he is not, why doesn't he get leave for a year, and come home and marry me outright? I am ready."

"Are you?" Millicent asked gently.

Ida's colour rose. "I know what you mean. I amuse myself with other people sometimes; but, Millicent, I am—I am true at heart; however wicked and irreligious, and horrid you may think me, I am true to him. If he is not true to me it is too hard—too hard!"

"Poor child! poor Ida! I always feared this for you; and now it is come I must try to help you; but I must speak plainly—lecture, as you call it—first."

"Well, go on; only I am not a child—I am as old as you were when you married, Millicent; as old in years, and oh! five times as old in heart."

"Ida, there was never any one who drifted on into foolishness and love of admiration, and worldliness, *against* their inward conviction, as you have done, who was happy. For the last two or three years especially, you have been like some one following a wrong road, which he knows will lead him astray, and yet, tempted by some seeming attraction by the wayside, persists in going on, persists in stifling his convictions, persists in persuading himself that he is just as likely to get safe to his destination by that way as by another. Ida, if you are to

have disappointments and trials, thank God for them; you cannot be happy to go on as you are."

"I dare say you are right; but nevertheless I expect it will be the same to the end of the chapter. Here come your three unromantic children, Millicent, so we must talk about something else. What a nice pretty girl Susan Hayden is."

"Mamma, mamma," Randolph shouted, "we saw Mr. Davis just now; and he says the little ponies are coming for Stephen and me; but Stephen is a baby, he won't be able to ride—Parkins says so."

"Gee-gees, gee-gees," echoed the twins breathlessly, as they buried their sunny heads in Aunt Ida's lap, ruthlessly stamping on the folds of the elegant barege with its wide sash, where Randolph's feet had already done mischief.

"Gently Evie and Elsie; and, Randolph, my darling, how is it you are always pushing Stephen down?"

"'Cause he's a baby," said Randolph stoutly, "and cries more than babies do; I'm as big, and I am not afraid of papa's horse, or Nep, or nothing."

"Yes, Randolph I know all that; but listen!

your cousin is not very strong, and you must be gentle to him."

"Why?"

"Because I say so; because you will make mamma unhappy if you quarrel with poor Stephen."

"He isn't poor. I don't love him a bit—I *don't*." Then, seeing the grave look on his mother's face, he added, "I won't thump him any more, and I'll give him the big ball with blue stripes—you know; that's why he is so cross, he wants the big ball with the stripes. Papa! papa!" and Randolph ran to meet his father.

Sir Stephen Legh, on the table-land of which we spoke just now, shows but little or no change in his personal appearance; there is a change, however, in the quick ardent gesture with which he raised the boy to his shoulder, and with the other hand patted little Evie's head, as she, too, clung about him.

"Seems to me Sir Stephen would ruin Master Randolph, if it wasn't for her ladyship," had long been the verdict of the old housekeeper, Mrs. Bligh.

"Yes, it is curious to see him all at once unbending, to be so free and pleasant, like his brother

was before him," Parkins would rejoin; "it is a thousand pities the dear old lady couldn't have lived to see Mr. Randolph grow up again, for the child's his living image, Mrs. Bligh."

It was quite true, and probably the likeness to the dead brother, over whose bright head the waters closed on that summer day long ago, endeared the child to Sir Stephen's heart, with a mingling of past and present tenderness. It was not a wise love, Millicent saw that; and it was just as determined—just as uncompromising as every feeling of her husband's would ever be. This often made her anxious; and the resolute will—so very near the obstinacy which is the exaggeration of all firm decision—gave her many pangs. This had increased rather than lessened in Sir Stephen Legh's character; as of old, he took up certain opinions, and certain modes of action, and believing himself right—as in the main, to do him justice, he mostly was—he held firm, and grew harder to turn, or to argue with, or make any outward impression on. If we were to say, that in all the five years of her married life, Millicent Legh had never known a cross word from her husband, it would be nearly true. But, nevertheless, he had managed to make her uneasy, and to bring a cloud over her sweet face

many a time. In trifles, as in greater things, Sir Stephen was intolerant of change, which jarred against his will; and those things which he did not actually forbid, he coldly allowed, and no more.

Millicent's health and comfort, her happiness and well-being, was his constant aim. He was proud of her love, of her gentleness, of the sweet unselfishness of her character. He liked to hear her praised, to see her shining with a quiet lustre, at home and abroad, and to feel she was his, chosen for her own sake, and just as superior to the common type of womanhood as he knew she would prove. That she should have every thing befitting her position as his wife, was his one desire—that she should have every wish for personal comfort gratified, he delighted to see was done. But there were other wishes, which met no sympathy, and the strain Millicent put upon herself, to obey her husband in all things, and yet pursue her way in the little acts of Christian love and courtesy to others, which were her duty as well as her pleasure, had told upon her. Something of the gladness of her youth had died out of her. Strong temptations arose within, which had to be fought against and conquered—to help and visit the poor, to do little services to some in inferior positions,

without her husband's knowledge, when he did not give any signs of approval. But allegiance to him was too strong for that, and she always sought the tacit consent, which chilled her heart to receive, before she moved in things, about which his approbation was doubtful. Such would be the sending of game and fruit in their seasons; and many a brace of pheasants or a fine hare found its way to Church Court, or the Bartons, or to the homes of numberless other people, who had a sick child, or a delicate sister, or whose small incomes made the arrival of the glossy-plumed birds, tied together with the printed label, "From Sir Stephen Legh, Sidcote," a most acceptable sight. Such would be the invitation to dinner, or as guests for a day or two, to people to whom she knew it would be a pleasure and a refreshment; the bringing out shy modest girls at the pleasant little luncheon parties, and five o'clock teas, which were so frequent at Sidcote. She would combat Sir Stephen's objections with a smile, and she would make an effort to take patiently the order that such and such people were *not* to be invited—that she was not to bore herself with a stupid girl like that, or a great gawky boy like this; and that just when she was hoping

that the said stupid girl was warming into something like interest in what she was trying to instil, as the aim of all women's lives; and the gawky boy—that most hopeless subject of all benevolent schemes — becoming a little less gawky, and more intelligent. Troubles of this sort had certainly thickened of late.

Florence Legh had now been more than a year a widow, her husband having died at one of the foreign watering places, of the paralysis, which, from the effects of the fall, had gradually crept over him. She was often at Sidcote with her child, and the jealousy and bitterness she had long encouraged against Millicent, had rather increased than diminished. Even Lady Legh's gentle nature could scarcely brook the perpetual reference which was made to their different positions, especially the contrast between Stephen and the little heir of Sidcote. That Florence took pains to make Randolph dislike her was undoubtedly obvious—but the boy seemed instinctively to turn from her—and was always more uproarious when she was present. Indeed, it must be confessed, little Stephen, always delicate and puny, had a hard time of it with his cousin Randolph. No wonder that he often found his way from riotous play to

the nursery, and preferred the company of Elvie and Elsie to that of their brother.

As Sir Stephen drew near, with Randolph on his shoulder, Ida rose. "Is Mr. Roberts gone?" she asked. "I did not intend to stay to-day. Is he gone, Stephen?"

"Yes," was the somewhat short answer; "you can drive home with Millicent, after luncheon. Now, boy, the white gee gees are come; where's Stephen? Let us all go and inspect them."

Randolph wriggled down from his father's arms, and scampered off followed by Aunt Ida, who, never perfectly at ease with Sir Stephen, and conscious of his frequent disapproval, always tried to escape him. The twins dragged Susan Hayden and a nurse maid, also, towards the stables, and Millicent and her husband fell behind.

"What did Mr. Roberts want, Stephen?"

"Money," was the laconic reply.

"Money, Stephen! what for? A church, or ——"

"No," was the answer, with a little bitter laugh. "Mr. Roberts has tried his bankers and his friends generally in vain, I suppose, and came to me as the last hope. He only wanted to

borrow ten thousand pounds—a mere trifle he called it—and was insolent when I refused."

"Is he in difficulties, then?"

"I should imagine he was, though he assured me I should regret not making such a good investment of my money. But not a word more now, or at any other time about that interview—I wish to forget it. Hallo, Randie! wait a moment."

They had passed through the shrubbery now, at the back of the house, and were crossing the wide sweep which led round to the stables. Here stood two tiny, beautiful white ponies, exactly alike, with the prettiest saddles and bridles, while a groom and Mr. Davis looked them well over, as Randolph clamoured to be lifted on.

"They are very quiet, James?" Sir Stephen asked of the groom.

"Like lambs, Sir Stephen," was the reply; and Mr. Davis expatiated on their diminutive proportions to Lady Legh, and took honour to himself for having negotiated the purchase with a gentleman in a distant county.

"But the children are very young, Mr. Davis," Millicent began. "I hope there can be no risk."

"Not the slightest," Mr. Davis said, and Millicent watched with pride as her husband lifted Randolph to the saddle, where the boy sat erect, holding the reins in his hand, as his father taught him, and a little indignant at the protecting arm which was thrown round him as Cherry paced slowly round the drive, and the little sisters baby voices cried for a ride, too.

Then Mrs. Legh and Stephen came upon the scene, and Stephen's large blue eyes, so often dimmed with tears, so often fretful in their expression, gleamed with pleasure.

The other pony's name was Violet, and Stephen was soon mounted on its back, though his small slight figure, in its handsome suit of velveteen, with the Scotch cap and plume, cuffs, collar, and studs, formed a contrast indeed to his cousin's appearance, whose sturdy limbs were rejoicing in the freedom of brown holland, and his crisp, short, sunny curls were surmounted by a straw hat, evidently the worse for the knocks and batters which the wearer inflicted on it with a ruthless hand. By the time all Mrs. Legh's hopes and fears, and admirations and thanks were exhausted, there were plenty of servants gathered round as spectators, and amongst them a fair-haired lame boy on

crutches, with a portfolio in his hand. He came towards Susan Hayden, and Lady Legh smiled and nodded to him.

"Your genius ought to draw this pretty scene, Millicent," Florence said, putting her glass to her eye. "Some day do let Randolph be dressed, and let the poor boy try to sketch both children on their ponies. Not now," as Millicent took the sketch-book from Herbert's hand, "not now; that old hat of Randie's would be a little too picturesque. What do you say, Ida?"

But Ida's thoughts were evidently not with the present. That something was wrong with Mr. Roberts she knew by the way he had lashed the horse almost to frenzy, as they had driven over from Bella Vista that morning. She was longing to get Millicent away from the others, and ask her what had passed between him and Sir Stephen. But Millicent was looking at Herbert's sketch, and Susan stood by, listening with proud delight, as she heard the genuine commendation which was bestowed on the drawing, both by Lady Legh and Mr. Davis.

"My mother begged me to tell your ladyship," said Herbert, colouring with modest satisfaction, "that the gentleman, Mr. Vere, sent us a

post-office order for two pounds for that little drawing of the East Lodge Gate, and I am to do another for the same lady, Mr. Vere says, when I can."

"I am very glad, indeed, Herbert. Are you not tired with your walk up here? Go into Mrs. Bligh's room, and Susan shall come too, and hear home news when she has taken Miss Evie and Elsie up to the nursery."

The half-maid, half grand-nurse, Mrs. Banks, who was one of the thorns which Mrs. Legh always brought in her train, here said—

"You can go with the poor cripple now if her ladyship pleases. I'll see that the young ladies go up to Mrs. Harris. Dear, what a most engaging sight our dear Master Stephie looks—so like his poor dear papa, as I say, in that suit in particular. *He* might be a prince, I am sure," with a meaning glance at Randolph's brown holland. "Such 'air as that is not seen every day of the week. The curls shine like gold itself."

Mrs. Banks' orations were almost too much for Ida's equanimity, and she turned impatiently away, with a gesture of disgust, Millicent following. It was what Ida wanted. She turned sharply round—

"Well, Millicent, what was it? What did he want? Mr. Roberts, I mean."

"I am not sure that I ought to tell you, Ida."

"Then I will guess; money."

Millicent did not deny it.

"I thought so, and from what I have heard, Curtis and Georgie will help on the crash. Depend upon it, Millicent, we shall all be 'up the spout,' as that refined Curtis would say, in a day or two. The glories of Bella Vista are departing."

It was as Ida Gardiner prophesied. The very next day all Dunsford was ringing with the news of Mr. Roberts's bankruptcy, of the stoppage of the great cloth mill, and the ruin of some hundreds of people, who were swept into the gulf of ruin by the manufacturer's failure. No one was surprised, so every one said; and, to judge by the hard and ill-natured remarks, no one was very sorry. Those who had looked in prosperity with a more kindly eye on Mr. Roberts, now lashed him unmercifully. For a whole week all Dunsford talked, and wondered, and speculated: the gentlemen, as to what the dividend would be; the ladies, as to what the furniture would sell for; if Mrs.

Roberts was very much broken-hearted—and how completely satisfactory it was that this end had come—it was so evidently a marriage for the sake of what she could get by it, and with the hope that her sons and Ida would do grand things for themselves. What a disappointment for her, poor thing; for the Brookes had for a long time looked significant when asked about that marriage; it would for certain never come off now. And then there was poor Esdaile at sea, and Georgie doing no good at Cambridge with Curtis. It was really a great lesson to all scheming for worldly advancement, such as poor Mrs. Gardiner's had been.

This was the verdict of the little world of Dunsford, and the verdict of the little world of many another place would have been the same.

When Mrs. Hayden's husband, the corn-dealer, died insolvent, and his debts were freely spoken of on all hands, there was far more sympathy expressed, for he lived modestly and quietly in his tradesman's house, with no pretensions about him, though with great comfort. Thus, though his fault was almost precisely the same as Mr. Roberts's, he was pitied and mourned over as an unfortunate man, and the case was talked about with a sort of sympathy. But

Mr. Roberts had been bumptious, and arrogant, and assuming, rude to his inferiors, cringing to his superiors in rank. Great in acts of charity, where his name would figure in subscription lists with Lord Senhouse, Sir Stephen Legh, and the gentry of the neighbourhood, but hard and stingy in the extreme, so report said, with those of his workpeople who were sick, or poor, or miserable. But some tender hearts were touched even now by the weight of popular displeasure which fell on Mr. Roberts. He descended in his adversity to the lowest depths of his fellow townspeople's contempt, and his past arrogance and folly were heavily visited upon him.

Alas! the judgment of the world is ever hard and pitiless. Is there one amongst us who has not felt it to be so sometimes? But there is One who cometh not with the words, "Pay me that thou owest," but in gentle accents whispers, "I forgave thee all that debt." And as with the Master, so with the disciple, following in his footmarks, often with wavering and uncertain steps; those who walk according to his will, pray to be delivered from the sin of judging a brother or a sister with unrighteous judgment, remembering that after all we see but the surface

of things, with earthly eyes, and that God looketh on the heart.

Lady Legh's visit to Bella Vista, two or three days after the bankruptcy had been declared, was one of the most trying experiences of her life. Strange figures were seen gliding about those rooms now. Tickets were staring at her from the gilded tables, and other furniture in the entrance-hall. A man with a pencil in his mouth, and a little red book in his hand, stood by to let the footman pass, as he ushered Lady Legh into the little morning room, which had lately been appropriated by Julia and Ida. An unwonted hush seemed to be in the house, the servant himself spoke in a low, subdued voice, and Millicent's heart failed her, as he said he would "tell Mr. Roberts her ladyship was there. Mrs. Roberts had not left her room that day."

Wondering if Ida knew she had come, Millicent spent two or three minutes of suspense; then the door opened, and Mr. Roberts himself appeared. He attempted a care-nought, huffy manner at first, but broke down, and the only words Millicent caught were—

"It was kind of you to come. Poor Lizzie is not up, but she will like to see you."

"Is Ida at home?"

"Yes, sitting with her mother, poor thing. I was to ask you to walk up."

"This is a pretty mess," he said, presently, "brought on entirely by a scoundrel pressing me for a heavy payment. He knew it would ruin me; he did it on purpose. Heaven preserve us from our friends, say I; be they connections, baronets, or others. I don't want to offend you, but Sir Stephen was preciously disagreeable the other day. Of course he had a right to please himself, and so have I, and I hope never to speak to him again."

Poor Mr. Roberts, in his excitement, was forgetting himself, and all propriety together. Millicent's rejoinder brought him to his senses.

"We will not discuss my husband, Mr. Roberts. Shall I go upstairs now?"

He prepared to go with her, when she stopped him: "I know my way, thank you," and then a sudden pity for the crestfallen, unhappy man, made her speak: "I am really so sorry for you," she said. "I understand nothing of the money part of the subject; but I can and do enter into your trouble. All trouble of every kind is sent us for some good end. You said your friends failed you; won't you let this take you to your best Friend?"

"Thank you. Yes, that sort of thing is the best for me, I know. I am off to London in an hour; will you look after 'poor mamma' a little?"

"Indeed I will," and so the interview closed.

That with her poor step-mother was even more distressing to Millicent, tears and helpless grief, and Ida sitting by with a white, rigid face, powerless to comfort, powerless to suggest any source of comfort. Millicent wished to take her back to Sidcote, but she steadily refused.

"I must give myself up to her now," she said, as they stood for a minute in the dressing-room adjoining, "to protect her from Aunt Bob and Julia, if for nothing else. They nearly drive me wild, Millicent, saying that all this is *her* fault, our fault, our extravagance and high notions. Georgie, poor fellow, has been making the money spin with Curtis at Cambridge, no doubt; but one was as bad as the other. Millicent, darling, perhaps I shall turn out better than you expect. I am getting a letter ready for the Bombay mail, you know to whom; that shall be at an end now. No, don't kiss me any more, I don't want to break down. But it is so dreadful, and I hear from the maids, that the hands, as they call them, are in great distress, and unless the mill is bought and the business set going again there will be terrible

ruin to many. To look at the very best side of the case, heaps of people will suffer, Millicent; we who have been dressing and feasting with this money ought to atone; but how can we?"

How indeed? Millicent was unprepared to answer that question; and when a few days had passed, and the dividend of five and sixpence in the pound was declared, when Mr. Roberts returned from London in fresh spirits, full of the decoration of the small house at Seaforth, where he proposed to remove his family, only a few degrees less his old arrogant self than he was before, Millicent's heart misgave her. How could he take such a burden easily? how could he speak of his failure now as a misfortune thousands of men had undergone before him, and had righted themselves at last, as he should right himself in time, he did not doubt.

"Ida is coming here to-day," Millicent said to Sir Stephen one morning. "Be kind to her, Stephen; she is trying to do right."

"Kind, dearest; I find it difficult to be kind to Ida—such a very popular and dashing young lady is quite independent of me or my attention."

"Stephen, don't speak so; she is my sister, and I love her dearly. Remember what a home she has lived in for years, and those the most

important in a woman's life, and judge her tenderly."

It was very rarely now that Millicent pleaded with Sir Stephen, and she felt worn and harassed to-day, so that her voice was trembling in her earnestness.

"I feel as if I might have done more for Ida all these years," she said, "and I cannot help reproaching myself."

"Nonsense, my dear, what would you have done more? you are only too kind to everyone. I always tell you it is your weak point. Don't distress yourself about this man's bankruptcy, it seems he has secured enough to live upon, and comfortably, too. So let him go to Seaforth, and get into, what is it—shipbroking and coal-yards—and let Dunsford forget him. I hear a very good, respectable man has taken the mills, which I am heartily glad of. He will prove an honest man, too, I hope; but real hearty honesty isn't a common virtue, I am afraid."

"There is an instance of it very near us, Stephen, in my pets, the Haydens, as you always used to call them. Think of that good woman having toiled, and pinched, and screwed for nearly six years, and having at last paid up every farthing of her husband's debts. It is refreshing

to think of it, and how she put every consideration aside for this end, and how she has prospered. To let Susan come as a servant here must have been a trial, when one thinks what different views she must once have had for her; then how uncongenial was the trade of that little shop; how she longed to let Herbert have purer air and more comforts; but by patient endurance he helped his mother bravely, and theirs is the blessing that maketh truly rich. Herbert's health is better, his prospects for the future as an artist, I do believe, are good, and now the mother is free to go with him and the youngest child to London, which, with a little help, can soon be managed, so that Herbert will have the advantages his talents deserve."

"Who is to give the little help, Millicent?"

"Oh! I can do that. You don't think, Stephen, all your liberal allowance goes for decorating me, and my son, and daughters, do you?"

"You are a good child," he said, tenderly, and he raised his face to kiss her, as she leaned over his chair. And when, soon after, she left him Sir Stephen Legh thought about her with a sense almost of fear.

Yes, she was very good; was she too good for him? Was it fancy, what Florence Legh had

said lately, that Millicent looked delicate? and what did that expression in a letter from Mrs. Howard mean which she had shown him—something about the wonders the climate of Westquay had worked on her son; how much duty he got through, as Mr. Russell's curate, in the winter; and how often they wished Sir Stephen would bring Millicent there for the next winter, especially as she did not feel very strong?

But Sir Stephen was not one to indulge in any undefined fear, so he turned resolutely away from the thought which was so unpalatable; and it never occurred to him that if his wife was not very strong, as Mrs. Howard said, he often overtaxed her in requirements which wore the guise of affection. Only the evening before, she had dressed early for a dinner-party and was resting in her room, when he came in, little Randolph with him. The twins were in bed, but Randolph was always privileged to be with his father at dressing time, and allowed to run riot with slippers, and dressing-case, and studs, with scarcely a word of remonstrance.

Millicent was very tired, and as the child rushed across the room to the door which opened into Sir Stephen's dressing-room, she said, "Be gentle, Randolph, darling, mamma's head aches."

The words brought the boy back with a bound to her side; and the long folds of his mother's light evening dress were in great jeopardy, and so was the beautifully arranged hair, of which Ruth was so proud, from his boisterous hug.

"Oh, Randolph, take care," his father interposed; and then he turned to Millicent. "My dearest, I never like you in that dress, and I particularly wanted you to appear to advantage to-night; Florence looks so regal in her black velvet, and Marie Stuart cap. Is there time to change?"

"I am afraid not, Stephen."

"Oh, very well; only do remember I like you in that purple moire gown, especially for dinners—light blue is trying to you, now you have so little colour."

He went into his room as he spoke; and Susan Hayden coming soon after for Master Randolph, was ordered to ring for Ruth.

Then with a great effort the dress and ornaments were changed, just as the carriage came round; and Sir Stephen's only remark was, "Ah, I thought you would be of my opinion; there can be no question about the dress." He never thought of the weariness and trouble he had

given her, then or on many other occasions, when she was called to write a note, to drive, to walk, to go hither and thither with him, and give opinions about fruit and flowers, and all the hundred and one small interests of a country gentleman's life. And yet if she went at all out of the prescribed track in visiting her poorer friends and neighbours, even in going to church in the week, or things of that kind, her fatigue was immediately put down to those causes, and she was assured she was too precious to be allowed to tire herself in that way. It was the same leaven running through everything—Sir Stephen Legh's way was the right way, and his will must be law, though enforced in the covert manner which is more, not less, trying than an open despotism.

Ida Gardiner came that day, for her last visit before going to Seaforth; and Mr. Vere also "turned up," as he said, about luncheon time. Sidcote had ever an attraction for him, and he always felt less of his worldly crust over him there than anywhere else. The alteration in Ida Gardiner struck his keen eye very soon, and he inquired of Lady Legh what "change had come over the spirit of her dream—she seemed suddenly transformed from a gay butterfly to a sober moth, loving the shade and retirement."

"Look at her now," he said; and Millicent followed the direction of his eyes to the drooping listless attitude of the figure in the bay window of the drawing-room, as they could see it from the terrace where Millicent and Mr. Vere were walking together.

"Has Brooke given her up then, the scoundrel?" he asked, as he listened to the story which in few words Lady Legh repeated.

"No; it is Ida who has written to release him from their engagement; he has been flagging in correspondence for some time, and his friends here have allowed a wider and wider gulf to lie between them and poor Ida, long before these troubles came."

"Well, she won't break her heart for that silly fellow, I trust, with his 'soft nothings,' and his intense conceit."

"You know him, then?" Lady Legh asked.

"I have seen him," was the reply. "She was a million times too good for him."

Here Mrs. Legh joined them, and Millicent had to go through the string of common places which were so trying.

"Poor Ida! doesn't she look well in that simple dress, without a single ornament—such good taste in her too just now. But, Mr. Vere,

do fancy that bright radiant creature, so full of intelligence, and refinement, going to live in a little gossiping watering-place like Seaforth, with those people. I do think, Millicent, you ought not to allow it—it may be unkindly interpreted by the world."

"I did not know that a duty to a mother could ever be misinterpreted," was Millicent's cold reply.

Mr. Vere did not speak; his eyes were again in the direction of the window, where the figure in the quiet grey dress still kept its position.

The cold acceptance of her offer of release from her engagement had come by the Bombay mail, but as yet she had had no courage to tell even Millicent.

But Ida's was a nature that might bend, but would surely rise again; if her patience and endurance were to be sorely tried in the stucco marine villa at Seaforth, she was there to come out —free from much of the dross that had dimmed the beauty of her girlhood; and, by living for others, discover the pleasure of life for herself. What did it matter that Mr. Roberts laughed and scoffed when she returned him every present of value he had ever made her. What did it matter that Miss Roberts and Julia rallied her on her

dowdy appearance, and assured her hers was a style that needed bright and rich colouring. Ida could bear it all, and did bear it bravely and well. She became the comfort of her ailing mother, and, insensibly, the good influence of the uncomfortable household; while her high spirit and independent nature carried her through all the hundred vexations and mortifications which a position like the Roberts's necessarily brings. So step by step was she led back, as it were, to the times of early childhood, when Millicent and she had been so happy together in seeking the way of holiness and peace. Old impressions, long lying dormant, revived, and old desires awakened. This world had proved to her taste vain and unsatisfying, and higher hopes and aims began to assert themselves—hopes and aims for the world which is to come.

CHAPTER X.

THE GREAT INHERITANCE.

"He came in the night,—
The Master came for His own:
He gathered the lilies white,
And the violets scarcely blown.
They will bloom more bright
Around His throne!

"They were so young, so fair;
They had scarcely tasted of pain.
They died like the summer flowers.
Would ye call them back again?
Back to the winter of life;
Back to its toil and its strife?
Back from the heavenly bowers?
Nay, theirs be the fadeless light;
And the darkness be only ours!"

E. C.

"WHAT shall I do about this invitation of Mrs. Majoribanks, Millicent?" Mrs. Legh asked one bright September morning, a few months after the Roberts's bankruptcy had engrossed the world of Dunsford. "The old lady was so fond of

dearest Henry, I think I can hardly refuse her, and yet she mentions not being strong enough to bear a child in the house. Isn't it perplexing? One can't give up old friends."

There were some who thought Mrs. Legh had found the process of forgetting those who had once been amongst her chosen friends rather an easy one—but perhaps they were mistaken.

"No," she went on, "after all Mrs. Majoribank's kindness to him who is gone, I really must not offend her, but it is very trying."

"You can leave Stephen here for a few days, cannot you?" Millicent asked.

"Oh, I can; but the trial of separation is so great; besides, I cannot move without Banks, you see."

"Well, I am sure Nurse and Susan Hayden, whom I scarcely consider as a servant, will do their best in the nursery, and we will take the same care of Stephen as of Randolph. If you are happy to leave him, and can trust us sufficiently, pray do so."

Of course Mrs. Legh was quite happy to leave the boy, and she had been driving to bring matters to a point.

Mrs. Majoribanks' was a house, where, as autumn drew on, all the nicest people were sure

to gather. Mrs. Legh was pleased and flattered at the old lady's remembrance, and the remark in the little cramped hand writing, "I don't ask your boy—he is an only one, and is sure to be spoiled," was allowed to pass without resentment. "I want you," the old lady said; "you can make yourself agreeable, and, you see, I have got a tribe of people coming on the eighth," and then followed a list of the expected and distinguished guests at Malton Court, which Mrs. Legh, so lately emerged from her year of widowhood, found it hard to resist; indeed, she never had any real intention of resisting, but she thought it necessary to make a show of doing so. Sidcote was not her acknowledged home, for she was, as she said, always looking for some place where she might find a little nest with her boy, and during the summer Sir Stephen and Millicent and their children had all been away from Sidcote, and Florence had taken that opportunity of absenting herself also. Now she was only there on her way to another place," a plea to which Millicent had become pretty well accustomed by this time.

This little visit to Malton Court was to be made, and then she must really think about settling elsewhere.

To this Sir Stephen made his unfailing reply,

that Sidcote was always open to her; and the equally unfailing remark to his wife followed. "They have a just claim on us, both the mother and the child, and we must not forget it. It is quite a different matter from putting oneself out of the way for strangers."

So it was; and Sir Stephen put himself in this instance, or in any other, very little out of the way. The full burden, if burden it was, fell upon his wife; and she never let any one see it, or scarcely suspect that she felt it as such.

Mrs. Legh drove off with Banks, to Malton Court, one morning in September, taking a pathetic farewell of Stephen, and promising him all kinds of impossible presents on her return, a fortnight hence; and Millicent's heart warmed more to little Stephen than it had ever done, as he put his small hand in hers, and said, in a natural childlike way,

"I'll try to be good while she is gone."

And he kept his promise. Everything went on more smoothly with the children, and Stephen and Randolph seemed to have signed a truce from hostilities. Every morning when the mists were clearing from the landscape, and the golden sunshine of a most radiant autumn was lying upon the Park, the children were to be seen on

the white ponies, which quite kept up their character for gentleness; and Stephen and Randolph, attended by a groom, would take their daily ride. Sir Stephen was away for two or three days' shooting, at Hale End, and Millicent took the opportunity of asking Ida to come over from Seaforth, and assist at an entertainment of the eight young Kennedy's, whose boisterous ways always roused Randolph's spirit to the utmost bound, and whose occasional visits were looked forward to with dread. Their high-spirited eager mother marshalled them up the Park, soon after an early dinner, and presently the garden and grounds were echoing with laughter and mirth. Ida promising to help the nurses to look after the whole crew, and try to maintain something like order.

"They will do very well alone, Miss Gardiner," Mrs. Kennedy said, as two rough girls were clinging to Ida's hand, and dragging her off to see the new swing, Violet and Cherry, and the tame deer, which always came up to the palings for bread.

"Look after Stephen, particularly, please Ida," Millicent called to her sister; "don't let the elder boys overpower him."

Then Lady Legh resigned herself to her

guest, and listened to the stories of the district, and the hope Walter had that the Bishop would give him the Parish Church of Dunsford, when the old rector died, as die he must before long. Of course they should be sorry to leave St. Mary's, but with nine children, it was necessary to look about them, and do the best they could.

And Millicent quite agreed to this, and in her heart thought that thus a way might be made for the Howards' return, and Sir Stephen might learn to appreciate them more after the change. But there was no time to think much about any thing, where Mrs. Kennedy was. She was an immense talker, and passed from one subject to another so rapidly that rejoinder was next to impossible. The amount of heedless mischief she made by a flow of gossip and small talk about other people and their concerns, was wonderful. She quoted Walter as an authority, and what Walter said to her, and what she said to him, till she got into a maze of truth and fiction from which she could not disentangle herself.

When Mrs. Kennedy and Florence Legh got together, the train was indeed set on fire; and Millicent purposely arranged this long afternoon with Mrs. Kennedy, during her absence from Sidecote. Nevertheless, there was the ad-

vantage of having to deal with Mrs. Kennedy, that she was what she seemed — insinuating remarks and covert allusions were not in her line—so that it was far easier to be on guard with her than with some people. She was simply an incautious outspoken woman, worldly in thought, and word, and deed, good-natured and impulsive, but as little fitted for the position of a clergyman's wife as any woman could be. Clergyman's wives! so much is expected from them, and it is so unreasonable. Why should they be supposed to be perfection any more than other people? Why may not they chatter and dance, and sing, like their neighbours? Why may they not be proud of their daughters, and take them to balls, and operas, if they have the chance? These questions are asked sometimes; and in reply, what can be said but that there is a question in the Ordination Service which is a very clear one, and not to be easily misunderstood. The priest and deacon answer it with the promise that they will apply themselves to fulfil the requirements of which it speaks, God being their helper. Should not every woman consider before she marries a clergyman of the Church, whether she is ready or not ready to do her part —to be diligent to frame and fashion herself and

the family of her husband, according to the doctrine of Christ, and to help him, as much as in her lies, to make both herself and her children wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ? The key of the whole matter does not lie in the often-repeated inquiry, "Where is the harm of a little dance, or a little party, or dress according to the latest fashion, or participation in the many pleasant things which offer themselves day by day?" but in the question—especially, for the wife of a shepherd of that little flock, of whom, when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, a true and faithful account must be rendered—"Are these things right for me?"

The eyes of many in the retired country village, in the manufacturing town, in the fashionable watering place, in the metropolitan district are upon the clergyman's wife. Surely a double weight of responsibility rests on her—a double condemnation, if her example is quoted by one of that flock of which the Ordination Service speaks, as an example, not for things lovely and of good report, but for things which are of the world, and befit such as mind earthly things.

Mrs. Kennedy and Lady Legh were turning towards the house when Millicent stopped. "Hark!" she said, "was that a scream?"

"I did not hear anything," was the rejoinder, "but my children inure me to every kind of noise."

And then she took up the thread of a long story where she had dropped it, and Lady Legh listened with just attention enough to allow of her giving an assent, or some other sign of understanding what her companion said, when a pause was made for the purpose. In another two or three minutes, as they reached the drawing-room windows, Ida met them. Her face betrayed that something was wrong. There was no need of the word which her sister tried to speak.

"What is it, Ida? The children! which of them?"

Ida's reply was lost in the stream of exclamation which came from Mrs. Kennedy, who rushed away—she scarcely knew where—to ascertain if it was one of *her* children who was hurt, and Millicent and Ida were left alone.

"Ida, tell me what it is; I shall be stronger when I know. Is it Randolph?"

Ida rallied her courage, and spoke calmly. "Yes, darling, it is Randolph. But he is not so *much* hurt; he and Stephen have fallen out of the swing in the shrubbery, but I think Stephen

is the most hurt. I was there, and saw it all. I do not think anyone is to blame; Mary Kennedy was in the swing, and held both children, but one of the elder boys' feet slipped on the grass, and he pushed it too high. Mary felt giddy, and relaxed her hold; they all fell out."

A shiver passed over Millicent, and Ida thought she was going to faint, but it was not so. She opened her eyes, and repeated Ida's words, "Stephen is the most hurt. Stephen! Well, let us go to them, Ida."

"Wait one moment, dearest; they are carrying them to the nursery. I have sent to Dunsford for Mr. Barnes and Dr. Henderson."

"Thank you; that is right. Then there is Sir Stephen and Florence. Some one must go to Malton for her. Pray let me go now; I *must* go."

With slow and feeble steps Millicent crossed the hall, and prepared to go upstairs. A figure crouched under one of the tables caught her eye.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"It's me; oh, it's me, Lady Legh. I couldn't help it; I couldn't help it, my foot slipped. They weren't going very high. It was Mary suddenly letting go. She is almost wild with fright." Sobs, and almost groans, escaped from Clare

Kennedy, which touched Millicent's heart. He never forgot how she stooped and kissed his forehead, saying—

"I am sure it was not your fault; tell your sister not to be unhappy."

On two little beds in the nursery the boys were laid. Stephen, motionless, and apparently with no sign of life, Randolph crying out and restless, saying he must get up, he was not hurt, but his cheeks were flushed crimson, his eyes large and bright, and when he saw his mother, he called out, "Mamma, mamma, why doesn't Stephen speak. Mamma, I did give him the big ball with the stripes, I did, mamma. Where's papa?"

To quiet and compose the one child seemed as hopeless as to rouse the other, and the minutes seemed hours till the doctors came. Mrs. Bligh and the nurse did their best, while Susan Hayden went noiselessly about, and seemed to comfort everyone by her gentle and unobtrusive attention. It was she that in the panic moved an easy chair to the side of Stephen's bed for Lady Legh to rest in, and went hither and thither on messages for everyone with that calm, collected manner which is given peculiarly to some in times of distress and trouble, and which can never be learned by others. At last the doctors were heard,

arriving almost simultaneously, and were met by Mrs. Bligh in the hall. Mrs. Bligh had met old Dr. Henderson there many times in days that were past.

"Oh, sir," she said, "I never did approve of naming that blessed child Randolph, especially in an accidental family like ours, for it is an accidental family, as I said to her ladyship only the other day."

Dr. Henderson, whose memory went back as far as Mrs. Bligh's, allowed that the Leghs had, doubtless, had much affliction of the kind, and Mrs. Bligh enumerated all the sad events at Sidcote till they reached the door of the room where the children lay.

Randolph started up as they entered, and to the amazement of every one, slipped off the bed, and staggered into his mother's outstretched arms. "Thought it was papa," he said. "I am not hurt much, only my head is heavy somehow. Poor Stephen! poor, poor Stephen!"

Dr. Henderson took the child on his knee, and then laid him on the bed again, saying he would examine Stephen first. The little white inanimate form breathed, but there was no other sign of life. So like he looked to his father on that day, now more than five years before, when

Mr. Vere and Sir Stephen laid him on the grass-grown floors of Flintstone Castle. So like that Millicent's heart failed her.

"What do you think of him?" she asked Dr. Henderson. "Will he recover? Will he know his mother when she comes?"

But Dr. Henderson was silent, Mr. Barnes using all the accustomed restorative measures, while the doctor held the small white hand in his, and counted the feeble pulsations.

There was a long silence, and still the doctors kept their watch, Millicent looking on with a concentration of agony in her face which was sad to see. Meanwhile Ida and Susan Hayden tried to quiet Randolph, and finding it was becoming more and more difficult, they took him to his mother's room, and Ida sat with him in her arms, soothing him, and singing to him in a low voice.

When Dr. Henderson came at last, he said—

"Are the messages sent to Sir Stephen Legh and the boy's mother?"

"Yes," Ida said, "one of the servants has ridden over to Lord Senhouse's, but I have not sent the telegram to Mrs. Legh; what shall we say?"

"I will write it if you please, and then I must attend to this little man. Turn him to the light."

Ida moved, and Randolph gave a loud scream, and winced as if he had been hurt.

"Ah!" said Dr. Henderson, hastily finishing the words of the telegram, with which Parkins was despatched. "Ah!"—it sounded ominously, and Ida asked—

"Is there anything very wrong?"

"I cannot tell at present. He must be undressed. Send for his nurse, and let me examine him. How far did they fall? It is very remarkable, I must say."

"Yes," Ida said. "The height from which they fell was nothing. One of the elder boys was pushing the swing, and his foot slipped on the turf. This gave the swing an unexpected lurch. The children were all thrown some distance, as far as the beech-tree, but from no great height, as I tell you."

"Humph! really, Miss Gardiner, good old Mrs. Bligh's word is strangely appropriate. It is an 'accidental' family. Just think, those two fine young creatures drowned. Mr. Legh's fatal illness, brought on by the roll down Flintstone Hill, and Mrs. Mason's husband, you know, Mrs. Legh's father, I attended him in this house. Dear, dear, I have known the family forty-eight years, and, upon my word, accidental is not a term

so much amiss!" So the good old doctor talked on, while the nurse was undressing Randolph, with the retrospective garrulity of age. Hours passed, and the watchers kept their post, Millicent hovering between the two rooms with a heart too oppressed, and aching for words or tears. Terrible hours of suspense and expectation they were. How should she meet Stephen's mother? The weight of anxiety and responsibility in his case outweighed at first the undefined terror she felt about her own child. Just as the clocks were striking ten the doctors reported a change. Little Stephen was better. He was conscious, and had asked for something to drink, while Randolph's excitement and fever continued, and Dr. Henderson's words, "I fear most for him now," fell like lead on the mother's heart.

"As soon as Sir Stephen arrives," Mr. Barnes said, "I shall desire to telegraph for a London opinion."

"For my child?" Lady Legh asked.

"For both children," was the answer. "The symptoms are not common."

"Do not wait for Sir Stephen's arrival," Millicent said, "I authorize you to do as you and Dr. Henderson think best."

Millicent heard the names of men eminent in

their profession discussed by the two doctors, and one was decided upon, to which she assented. The summons was despatched, and again there was a pause. Sir Stephen would reach home, it was calculated, about nine o'clock, but Mrs. Legh could not do so till early the next morning, unless she posted the entire distance. As wheels were heard, Millicent rose to go down stairs, but her husband's arms were round her before she could reach the head of the staircase. One glance at his troubled face, and Millicent, like a true woman, gathered strength.

"Randolph, little Randolph, how is he? It is Stephen who is in danger, is it not, is it not?" he repeated.

"*Both* are in danger, dearest, both were thrown from the swing, but Stephen is conscious now. Randolph is here in this room."

Sir Stephen went towards the bed where his child lay, and drew aside the curtain. The bright flush on the boy's face, and the great lustrous eyes turned up to his father with a half glance of recognition deceived him.

"Surely not much is amiss with him. Randolph."

"Papa, papa!" and then there was an effort to spring up to his father's neck, and the move-

ment and the excitement brought all the restlessness and wandering back again.

"Come and look at Stephen, dearest," Millicent said, wishing to draw her husband away, when she saw how his presence excited the child. "Come and see Stephen."

Sir Stephen obeyed, but the effort was evidently great to leave Randolph, even for a moment. They went together, however, and stood by Stephen's bed. Mr. Barnes was there. "He is better," he said. "I don't know what Sir William Harrison may say, but I think that the long fainting fit was the result of a shock to the nervous system in a delicate fragile child; I don't think he is seriously hurt."

Stephen heard them speaking, and looked up. Millicent loved him for the words which came first.

"How is Randolph, Aunt Millie? I dreamed I saw Randolph tumbling down a hill, just as papa did. I dreamed——"

But Mr. Barnes told him he must not talk; and Millicent and her husband left him.

Sir Stephen was going back to their own room, but his wife stopped him.

"Come and look at the twins," she said; and at the sight of his little daughters wrapt in

their soft dreamless sleep, Sir Stephen's power of speaking and asking questions seemed to return.

"Poor little things! poor little things!" he said fondly, "now tell me how this has happened. Tell me everything. Some boisterous play of those Kennedys, I suppose—some culpable neglect in the nurses. What could they be about? It seems impossible that any harm could come, when I saw the swing put up myself — when Davis tried it, and said it would bear his weight. It had a back to it, too, and cushions. I can't understand it, Millicent."

So he went on, going over all the circumstances, and reasoning over each in his own peculiar way, and almost refusing to believe the possibility that the children could have met with an accident from such a cause.

"But Randolph was so strong—such a sturdy fellow, that there could not really be any ground for alarm about him. Millicent was not very strong just now, and her fears had asserted themselves above her judgment."

Poor Millicent! all through that weary night she had to listen to a strain like this, and it is always so painful to hear everything referred to what are really second causes, and to hear those we love,

and whose sorrow is our sorrow, try to reason themselves out of their grief.

At last the night was over, and the faint dawn crept up. The great London doctor and Florence Legh would probably come by the first train. It was yet early when they actually did arrive.

Again a scene of deep distress was before Millicent, and she prayed to meet it calmly.

Florence was led into the breakfast room. Tears and cries and hysterical weeping Millicent had been prepared for, but not for the storm of reproaches with which Florence met her. Just as Sir Stephen was sure Randolph was not hurt, so Mrs. Legh was certain her child was dead; or that they would not tell her that he was dying, that he was so altered she should not know him; and losing all self-control she poured all this forth, mingled with the bitter words, "So you could not take care of him, my only one, for a few days."

Millicent listened patiently and pityingly, her white still face bending over Florence with a gentleness which those who saw it ever remembered as wonderful.

The great doctor was in consultation, and they had to wait till his visit was over till they could go upstairs.

Millicent left Florence for a few minutes to Mrs. Bligh and Banks, and went to her own room to await the verdict upon which so much hung.

It seemed hours—it was but minutes—before Dr. Henderson came to her sitting-room, and knocked at the door. As he entered Millicent went towards him.

"What does Sir William Harrison say?"

"He says that Stephen Legh will soon recover, but there are grave fears for little Randolph. I grieve to say it, Lady Legh, I grieve to say it—we will do our best, but he is in a high fever; whether latent in him, and developed by the fall, or brought on entirely by it, we cannot determine. Dear Lady Legh, we have not told Sir Stephen the full extent, he is so bound up in that child."

It all seemed to flash on her then—she must brace herself for what lay before her.

"Tell me, Dr. Henderson, is there no hope for—for my Randolph?"

"My dear Lady Legh, will you see Sir William Harrison yourself? will you and Sir Stephen see him together?"

"Yes; let it be here, please; bring them both here."

One minute Millicent was left alone, and the

words of one of old rose to her lips, "Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me," and other words were added from the depths of her unselfish nature, "Help me, oh, help me to help Stephen to bear this."

The courtly London physician came, Sir Stephen Legh and the Dunsford doctor bringing him into the room. Sir William Harrison was accustomed to scenes of this kind; the question, the momentous question, "Is there no hope?" had been asked him many and many a time; and he knew how to waive it, and how to answer it with that sort of doubtful decision which doctors think is merciful. But Sir William Harrison's heart misgave him as Millicent advanced to him, and, putting her hand into her husband's arm, said simply, "Will you tell us the truth about—our child."

"I regret to say there is great danger; the fever is high, and we fear the brain is the seat of the disorder; we fear that a reaction may come, and that the child may then sink into a stupor."

"Try some remedies," Sir Stephen said in his old authoritative manner. "Do you wish for another opinion from London? Do you know any one with whom you would like to consult, Sir William? Use some effort to save the boy—try some remedies."

"I am going to remain till eleven o'clock, at some inconvenience to myself; and you may be sure, Sir Stephen, we will apply ourselves to consider the case most carefully. I am glad to report favourably of the other little boy, and quite agree with Dr. Henderson and Mr. Barnes that he will be well in a day or two."

"I must go and tell his mother," Millicent said; and then, with her usual consideration for others, she said, "you were travelling all night; will you not go to the dining-room for some refreshment?"

The doctor bowed his thanks, and in his own mind registered the opinion that Lady Legh was a very uncommon character; but she looked delicate, very delicate, and he felt as if he would give a great deal to save the boy for her sake.

Florence Legh was still on the sofa where Millicent left her; Banks and Ida were entreating her to be calm, and it had become really difficult for her now to stay the torrent of hysterical weeping, while the night journey and anxiety together had really weakened her. Millicent's voice was very low but calm, as she touched Florence's arm.

"Will you not come to little Stephen now? Sir William Harrison thinks you may safely do

so; he will be quite well in a day or two." Mrs. Legh sprang up.

"Oh, is it true? is it true?" she exclaimed; you are only saying it to comfort me!"

"No," Millicent replied faintly; "no, Florence, you are spared the grief which God sees best to send to us—to Stephen and me; for our child, little Randolph, the worst is feared."

As she spoke, she laid her head upon Ida's shoulder, and a few heavy sobs broke from her. But it was no time to indulge in grief for one like Millicent; she recovered herself, and returned to her husband, and then they both took up their watch by the bed of their first-born child. Sir Stephen, in the bitterness of his soul, refusing to be comforted, and refusing to believe that danger could hover near that dearly loved child.

The hours went by, the slow sad hours, which were marked by the cries of delirium, when little Randolph talked wildly of Violet and Cherry—of his rides—of Stephen—what a baby Stephen was—but he would be kinder to him, he did love Stephen—breaking off into fragments of hymns his mother had taught him, and nursery rhymes, all mingled together in strange confusion.

Sir William Harrison stayed till midday, and

departed with his hundred guinea fee in his pocket book. The sweet pale face of the stricken mother haunted him strangely. "What can make her take such a hold on me," he said, as he settled himself in the railway carriage, and drew out a book, in the contents of which he would be buried till the train reached London. "Poor thing! poor thing! how calm and self-possessed she was, and yet that wistful look in her eyes, like a wounded deer! I can't forget it. Well, there is not a chance for the child; they may telegraph for Dr. Fowler if they please, but there is nothing to be done—nothing to be done." Then, with the force of habit strong upon him, Sir William Harrison returned to his book; and his various fellow-passengers speculated upon him, who he was and where he was going, and settled it that he was some one of importance by his pre-occupied manner. And in a few hours the great London doctor was in the rush of his daily life again, and before evening closed was standing by other beds, and giving his concentrated attention to other cases; and the little heir of Sidcote, and the pale stricken face watching by him, gradually faded away from Sir William Harrison's mind, and took up their position with the ever shifting figures which day by

day passed in array before him in his wide-spreading practice and fame as a consulting physician.

It fell out very much as he had foretold. Little Randolph's fever on the brain ran a short violent course, then a long stupor from which no efforts roused him, for many many hours. The child knew no one and heard no voice—his mother's prayers, his father's sighs, which came from the very depths of a troubled spirit, were all unheeded. The boy on whom so many hopes centred, lay sick unto death, and there was no hope, no hand outstretched to raise him up and restore the child to the mother.

It was the morning of the fifth day, the birds were beginning to sing in the trees, and the sounds of re-awakening life were to be heard around. Millicent and Susan Hayden had been on watch for two or three hours, and Sir Stephen had been prevailed upon to rest on the sofa in an adjoining room. Mr. Barnes, who had slept at Sidcote every night, had also gone to lie down. As Millicent watched the early eastern sunbeams creep in between the lines of the Venetian blind, she heard the door softly open, and presently a little white figure stood before her. Startled and alarmed she could scarcely repress an ex-

clamation of wonder, for with parted lips, and large wondering eyes, little Stephen Legh stood at the foot of the bed watching his cousin. The sunny hair was all shaved from Randolph's head, his face was drawn and sunk, the rosy beauty of his childhood gone, "like as it were a moth consuming a garment." No movement or sign of life but the laboured breathing and the restless motion of the small fingers as they lay upon the sheet. Susan Hayden took up Stephen, and was about to carry him away, when the child struggled violently and gasped out, "Aunt Millicent."

Millicent stretched out her arms, and Stephen fell sobbing into them. "Is that Randolph? is it? It isn't! It can't be! Oh! Aunt Millie. Oh! I do love him," he broke forth. "I do; tell him to speak to me."

"Hush, Stephen; hush, my darling. Be quiet; we must all be quiet here."

The child, evidently with a great effort, repressed his feelings, and buried his face on Millicent's shoulder. They were seated thus when the stillness of the room was broken by a voice, "Mamma—papa!" then a quivering of the heavy eyelids, and little Randolph looked up and smiled.

"He knows us; call Sir Stephen, and Mr. Barnes and nurse," Millicent said, as she put

Stephen gently down, and holding a spoon to her child's lips, murmured over him tender words.

He tried to swallow what she gave him but failed. "Stephen," he whispered, "Stephen," and Stephen crept close in mingled fear and love. "Kiss, kiss," the little voice faltered out, and then followed, what his mother, standing nearest, knew to be the words she had so often made him say after her, when in his wild boyish play there had been disputes with Stephen, "Little children, love one another."

"*Papa*," the single word was uttered with all his remaining strength. Sir Stephen Legh responded by broken inarticulate murmurs, as he came and knelt by Randolph's side.

"Say—it—about the lambs," and Millicent found voice to repeat the verse she had taught the two children only a week before. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; He shall gather the lambs with his arm," her trembling lips faltered here, and the child himself went on, so distinctly that all might hear; "carry them *home* in his bosom, mamma," adding the very word which he had often done in health, now so strangely appropriate. A bright smile so like himself, passing as sunlight over his face, and then the shadows gathered, and the end came—the end as far as earth was concerned.

The end, we say, when we speak of our last farewell to our beloved ones. Is it not rather the beginning of the better and holier life—the going home for the weary lambs, the gathering together those for whom the Shepherd died, those whom He came to seek and to save? The joyous radiant child is hidden from our sight, and we find it hard to say, and harder to feel, that though for us he is not, for God has taken him, Jesus holds him safe in His fold—His heavenly fold, where he is our child still, as much, or more, than when the sound of his coming footsteps, or the ring of his merry laugh, made our hearts glad. Our own still, where no moth nor rust can ever corrupt, and sin and sorrow shall enter not. Safe in the home of which little Randolph spoke, where, may God in his mercy give us, way-worn pilgrims, grace to follow and find them.

There is a sort of recognized opinion amongst us, that sorrows and deep griefs must of necessity change and refine our natures, and teach us to lift our earthly hearts upward and heavenward. In God's mercy this is sometimes the case, but it is not always, scarcely often so. The loving hand intends the trial He sends to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; but it is *we* who will not have it so, in our way-

wardness and sin. In the first moments of bitter grief we call upon the Name which is above every name, there will scarcely be found an exception to this; but the storm passes, and without God's grace we turn again to the world, and the things of the world, we are more, rather than less frivolous, or harsh, or irritable, or self-opinionated than before.

The long dreary winter which followed little Randolph's death dragged slowly on, and Sir Stephen Legh in his heavy sorrow missed comfort and profit for himself, and added a weight of trouble to Millicent's burden.

To go over all the details of those six terrible days, to blame every one connected with the accident, to express dissatisfaction about everything that was done by the doctors, to resent as it were his child's death on those who were with him when he fell from the swing; on the boy whose trip gave it the sudden impetus; on Mary the poor girl whose arm failed to hold the children in it, each and all of these details were gone over with distressing minuteness, and made poor Millicent sick at heart. Sir Stephen went out very little, and looked so worn and altered, that people said how far more acutely he felt the loss of his child than Lady Legh did. She was so

marvellously calm and quiet, it was really extraordinary. Even Sir Stephen would express to her his wonder how she could bear the sight of the Kennedys, or pet and love Stephen as she did; and once, when she gently remonstrated with him when he had harshly repulsed the little boy, he said—

"I cannot forget whose place his mother hopes he will have, if you can. Why was our rosy, healthy, noble child taken, and that little puny, sickly, whining boy left?"

"Why? dearest, we cannot know now, but we shall know one day. Will you not trust, where you cannot understand?"

"Ah! it is all very true, and I am glad you can take so much comfort. My heart was set upon that child, and he is gone, and I am desolate without him."

She came to him in her old caressing way. "Not desolate, Stephen, you have Eva and Elsie and *me* still left." Then she kissed him, and whispered words of consolation. And Sir Stephen's heart would smite him as he accused himself of ingratitude for such a wife. No one knew—how when the day had been mostly spent in trying to divert her husband's mind, in reading to him, driving and walking with him, when the

fatigue was often far too much for her; no one knew or guessed how she would, in the dusk of the twilight afternoon, seek her own room, and weep over the little treasures she had gathered there: the battered straw hat which Florence Legh had said was too shabby on the day he first rode Violet; the big ball with the stripes which he had given up to Stephen; the alphabet book with its large red and gold letters, where the mark of the little fingers might still be seen; the gilt watch and chain which she had stooped to pick up on the afternoon of the accident as she entered the nursery. Over these Millicent would weep the tears which came to her as a blessed relief, and which the handling of those familiar relics of her boy would bring in a blessed shower, which relieved the aching of her heart. Ah, me! few mothers are there who cannot understand all this better than I can write it here; understand too, the leaden sense of loss and grief, lying with an iron weight upon her soul. But Millicent's sorrow did indeed lead her where the sting of sorrow is taken away, and its turmoil is hushed, and the holy Dove folds his wings over the cross appointed us to bear. She prayed as well as wept, and braced herself for daily duty, with more diligence, coming out from her communing

with God, and with the dead, with a look on her sweet patient face, which was not of this world. If she had been gentle and forbearing before to Florence Legh, she was doubly so now, and was repaid for her unselfish consideration and interest in little Stephen, by the child's devoted love. To escape from Banks, and even his mother, and get a few minutes alone with Aunt Millicent was Stephen's dear delight. One day his knock was heard at the door, and on opening it, he came in with a troubled face, evidently trembling on the brink of tears.

"Aunt Millie, may I stay?"

"Yes, Stephen; but I can't read, I am so tired."

"I want to talk," the boy said; and seating himself on a low chair, he looked up into her face. He saw there the traces of recent tears, and, hiding his head in her lap, began to cry.

"What is it, Stephen? what is the matter?"

"It's that nasty Banks," he began, "and Jenny, the nurse-maid; they are talking so, I can't bear it; they daren't do it when Nurse and Susan are there, but they are gone out with the twins."

"What do they say that you do not like,

dear?" she asked, stroking the long silky ringlets which lay upon his black velvet coat, and which gave him the feminine appearance Sir Stephen was so hard upon.

"Banks says I am the heir of Sidcote now, and shall have everything here some day; and that of course mamma is pleased; and that I must take care how I behave, or perhaps another little Randolph will come, and then I shan't be. I don't know what they mean quite, but I do know I wish—I wish I could have Randolph back again; I wouldn't mind his romps if he would only come; and I don't want to be Sir Stephen Legh one bit."

"Banks is very wrong to talk to you in this way, Stephen; but never mind. If another little Randolph should come, I know you would love him dearly; and if not, you will try to be a good boy, and pray to grow up a good man, and so if ever you had Sidcote for your own, you might do a great deal of good, and help poorer people with what God had given you. Randolph, and you, too, Stephen, are heirs of a mansion far more beautiful than any earthly one; and it is better for my dear Randolph to have been called early to that inheritance than to live here to be master of Sidcote some day. Won't you try,

dear, to be ready to go to that inheritance, when Jesus shall call you?"

"Yes, aunt Millicent," he said dreamily; and then he added, "Papa is there; I remember papa. I used to like to sit with him when mamma went to hear the band at Kissingen. Papa used to talk about you."

"About me?"

"Yes; he said you used to read to him when he was first ill, and there was a hymn he taught me that you sent him in a letter; I had forgotten it, but Susan Hayden was singing it the other day, and it all came back. I only know little bits of it.

'Jesus, refuge of my soul,'

was the beginning. Papa said one evening that you first told him to make Jesus his refuge, he did, indeed."

Millicent could not bear this; her tears broke forth again, and Stephen nestled up to her, and cried, child-like, for sympathy.

Thus Sir Stephen Legh found them, and Stephen was abruptly ordered out of the room, while Millicent was told not to excite herself with that child, it was much too painful for her.

She was scarcely recovering herself when Florence Legh appeared, full of regrets that

dear little Stephen's conversation was too much for dear Millicent, but every allowance must be made for a child of seven who had the intellect of most children at twelve years old, and such extreme sensitiveness and imagination, and so on. Florence had always the effect of helping to restore Millicent to calmness, and to her she could never mention Randolph's name.

"It is a pity dear Millicent puts such undue restraint upon herself," Florence Legh would say to the friends and acquaintances who were only too ready to talk of the sorrow which had fallen upon Sir Stephen and Lady Legh. "It is certainly unnatural—her calmness, and I often feel very anxious about her. But she always had her little peculiarities; and really I think Sir Stephen is as much amazed as I am to see her composure. It is a gain indeed when people can attain it. Never can I forget what I went through that fearful night when the telegram reached Malton Court; such a journey, and such an arrival here; I wonder I lived through it."

"Yes; what a relief it must have been to you when you heard that your child was likely to recover."

"So much so that I could scarcely believe it. My Stephen is so ethereal, and so unlike the

world, while dear little Randolph was so very strong and robust, with nothing remarkable about him but his high spirit. I very often said I thought some day that tremendous spirit of his would bring trouble."

"But this was surely from the boy Kennedy tripping when he was pushing the swing." Lady Senhouse was the speaker. "The young Kennedys are a very rough set of children, I believe."

"Yes; it was so like dear Millicent to have them all here at once; my poor lamb had no chance amongst them all."

"My poor lamb!" remarked Lady Senhouse to her daughter as they drove home; "I wish she would shear the lamb of some of that golden fleece, and make the boy look more manly. Then how provoking it is to hear her call Lady Legh 'dear Millicent,' when in her heart she knows she dislikes her. How earnestly I hope another little son and heir may arrive in the spring to disappoint her ambitious scheme. I should be very sorry to see in her lamb the future Sir Stephen Legh, I must confess."

"You are always very hard on Mrs. Legh, mamma," was the rejoinder; "she can be so agreeable; and I heard at Malton Court last

autumn she was quite an attraction—singing so beautifully, too, I wish you would ask her to come to Hale End next time the house is full."

"No thank you, my dear," Lady Senhouse replied. "I have known Florence Legh rather longer than you have, and I don't want my daughters to set her up for a model; I would ten times rather have them after Lady Legh's pattern, perhaps without some of her religious notions, but as sweet, and gentle, and loveable."

Without her religious notions! How strange it is that while the beauty of the building often gains its meed of admiration from the world, the corner-stone on which that building rests is lost sight of and ignored, though nothing lovely and attractive is *secure* to last in this changing world *without* it.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEST HOME.

"Henceforward and for ever,
They live—live unto God:
He is their source, their object,
Their light and their abode.
As sea-flowers in the ocean,
As white clouds in the air,
He forms them and expands them:
Is round them everywhere.
They rest from all their labours,
Yet serve Him day and night;
Their earthly forms are sleeping,
But they in deep delight
Wait for the resurrection,
Of life the perfect crown;
The time of restitution,
Christ's triumph and their own."

"HYMNS FOR THE SICK AND LONELY." C. M. N.

IT had been a good winter for Westquay, so every one said; and now the countless invalids who flocked there for the dark and dreary days of November, December, and January, began to creep out to bask in the spring sunshine, pro-

tected from the easterly winds of March by a chain of hills, and open to the breeze which came over the blue waters of the bay from the sunny south. In the pleasant drawing-room of a pretty villa, the windows of which looked out upon the sea, on this March morning blue as the Mediterranean itself, Mr. and Mrs. Howard are at breakfast. Mrs. Howard is on her sofa, as of old, and scarcely looks older or changed, though it is five years since she left St. Mary's vicarage at Sidcote. For four of those years Maurice Howard has been curate of one of the principal churches in Westquay, and has regained health and strength to work with all his wonted zeal and energy.

The post has just come in, and Mrs. Howard, having no letter of her own, quietly waits till her son shall tell her what are the contents of his. Evidently there is something in one which interests and perplexes him too, for the lines deepen in his forehead, and his lips are closely compressed, while he scans the letter again and again with an earnest, eager glance.

"Well, Maurice?" Mrs. Howard questions at last.

The reply surprised her. "The rector of Dunsford is dead; Mr. Kennedy succeeds him,

and Sir Stephen Legh asks me if I am inclined to return to St. Mary's. I am not inclined; I shall refuse the offer, though it is kindly meant, I do not doubt. There is a note from Lady Legh too; take it, and read both hers and Sir Stephen's, while I begin my breakfast."

The same resolute voice—the same great searching eyes—the same uncompromising determined features as of old—and yet Mr. Howard was changed: over and above all there was an air of greater softness and gentleness; and this is manifest when he says, "Poor Lady Legh! poor Millicent! it is grievous to think of her; I know she must have a weary time with Sir Stephen; he is not the man to take a trial like the loss of his boy in a right spirit."

"Maurice, Maurice, you never can forget to be hard on the Leghs, though they are almost the only people now about whom I have to call you to account."

"Indeed, mother, I feel nothing but the keenest sympathy with Lady Legh. My returning to St. Mary's could not in any degree help her, I am afraid; moreover, I have work here, and could not see it right to leave it. Then you are so well at Westquay, *you* don't want to go back to Sidcote, surely, mother?"

"I am content either way. I confess I have often longed to be near dear Millicent, more and more since her great sorrow. But these are, of course, secondary considerations; it is your part to decide, Maurice."

"I think I have decided, then. I shall write by to-day's post."

"Write to her—to Lady Legh, too, Maurice, —kindly and gratefully too."

"Yes," Mr. Howard said; "I hope it will be a good appointment, whoever succeeds Mr. Kennedy. The new proprietor of the Cloth Mills is increasing the number of the workpeople, and there are a great many new cottages building about Mill Lane. The enlargement of the church will soon become absolutely necessary."

Mrs. Howard said nothing, nor did she tell him how, in one of her recent letters, Millicent had mentioned how small the congregation was at St. Mary's now, and that neither the poor nor the rich seemed to frequent the church. She pictured to herself, for a few moments, return to Sidcote, Maurice's return there, and her own pleasure in seeing it, and having everything as it used to be; and she almost wished Maurice would re-consider the matter.

"Wait till to-morrow, dear Maurice, before

you reply to that letter. Consult dear old Mr. Russell about it, before you finally decide."

"I will wait if you wish it, mother; but Mr. Russell will help me to no decision; my decision is made."

The letter was not written — was never written. The next morning, on his return from church, Mr. Howard saw a man at the door, with a paper in his hand. There were other inhabitants in Bay View, and when Mr. Howard heard the servant say, "Is it a telegram?" it did not strike him it could be for him.

He was passing into the house, when the servant said, "This is for you, sir." And then his eye fell on the address, and saw there could be no mistake—"Sir Stephen Legh, to Rev. Maurice Howard. You are earnestly requested to come at once; Lady Legh is very ill."

"Earnestly requested!" the very form of the message conveyed volumes. Sir Stephen Legh was not wont to beg earnestly for anything.

"You will go, Maurice," Mrs. Howard said. "You will go."

"Yes, at once," was the reply; "I can get off by the 11·30 train, if I make haste. What do you suppose the illness is?"

"Her baby is born, no doubt;" Mrs. Howard answered. "But oh! Maurice, Maurice, I always thought, especially of late years, that she would go early to her rest."

Mr. Howard made no reply; prompt and decided, he was on his way to the Westmouth Station in another ten minutes, and soon, in the face of a brisk March wind, he was steaming off in the railway.

At the junction for the Dunsford train, he got into a carriage with a keen-eyed elderly man, who, seemingly engrossed in a book, made no sign of being conscious of his presence. Not till Dunsford was reached, and the servant from Sidcote took possession of his fellow-traveller's rug, and led the way for him, as well as for Mr. Howard, to the Sidcote carriage, did it occur to him to think what was really the case—that his fellow-passenger was a London doctor, also summoned to the same sick-bed as himself.

Sir William Harrison, for he it was, walked with a quick, alert step, to the carriage, but Mr. Howard lingered.

"How is Lady Legh?" he asked of the servant.

The man shook his head. "Her Ladyship is very ill, sir. Dr. Henderson and Mr. Barnes have next to no hope."

Whether Sir William Harrison heard this or not, he made no remark, and the carriage drove off. All the familiar objects gave Mr. Howard a sense of pain. Memories of Millicent hovered everywhere. As in an open book, he seemed to see all her short, sweet life laid before him; and, as he thought, he registered bitter things against himself for many a hard judgment of one so gentle, so good, and so true.

Sir William Harrison took a side glance at his companion several times before he spoke, determining in his own mind that he was a clergyman—possibly a relation. At last he spoke.

"Do you know any particulars of this illness?"

"None," said Mr. Howard. "I was going to ask the same question of you."

"My telegram only stated a child was born last night, and there were alarming symptoms—that is all. But I saw Lady Legh last September, when I was called in to consultation about the children. I thought then she was very delicate, and requiring great care. It was a serious shock—the loss of that fine child—the heir too. Are you a brother, or——?"

"No relation whatever," was the answer. "I

once held the living of St. Mary's Church, to which Sir Stephen Legh was good enough to present me."

As he spoke, they were passing the Church and the Vicarage, and a rush of little Kennedys from behind the laurel fence, told that the carriage was expected. It turned in at the Lodge gate, and went swiftly up the avenue. The blue sky, and the brilliant sunshine, looked almost mercilessly bright; but the wind, which was sweeping over the Park, was keen and biting; and the leafless branches of the trees tossed their arms about, and quivered as if they felt cold and bare.

In the hall, a group of servants waited, concern and anxiety on every face.

Mrs. Bligh, having handed Sir William Harrison over to Dr. Henderson, turned to Mr. Howard. "Oh! sir," she said, and burst into a fit of crying; "oh! sir, step in here a moment; her Ladyship is, I believe, past hope. She goes out of one faint into another, and has never asked to see the child again. Another girl, sir, I am sorry to say; not that I should mind, only I know how pleasurable it will be to a certain lady I need not name. Mr. Howard! her Ladyship was too good for any of us—that's how it is

—and God saw we did not make enough of her, so He is going to take her from us. I will send you some refreshment, sir; and now you must please excuse me; I have many things to attend to."

Mrs. Bligh was gone, and Mr. Howard sat alone for some time. At last a summons came for him, and he obeyed it. As he entered the room, one look at that sunk, pale face, with all the golden hair turned back over the pillow, and Mr. Howard's eye—experienced now more than ever, since his work had led him amongst the sick and dying at Westquay—saw there was indeed no hope, as far as earth was concerned. Millicent smiled and stretched out her hand; and Sir Stephen, who stood on the other side of the bed, bowed his head. A few whispered words, which no one else could hear, passed between them; and then, at her request, the baby was brought to be baptized. Just as the service was beginning, she said,

"I wish Florence to be here, and little Stephen."

There was a pause while they were sent for, and when they came, the same radiant smile passed over Millicent's face. She held out her arms, and Florence, with an agony of self-

reproach, which no tongue can ever tell, received her loving kiss.

"Teach little Stephen to be good, and to be kind to my little girls," was audibly said, as Florence sank on her knees by the bed, and then she kissed Stephen and her own little ones, and signed to Mr. Howard to begin the service. Ida held the baby, who was named Millicent, by her father's voice. All the depth of Sir Stephen's love, and all the terrible pain of his coming loss, sounded in that single word, but every sound, even the sound of bitter anguish, seemed hushed in that still room.

Another service followed, even more solemn than the Baptism, and then the doctors returned, and the watchers withdrew for a little while. So it went on for some hours longer; the feeble flame flickered every now and then, only to sink lower than before. She said but little; sometimes they caught her children's names, and Stephen's blended together in her prayers. Once she called Randolph, and said, she heard the song he was singing, and would learn to sing it too. The beautiful unselfishness of her daily life was concentrated in those last few hours. Fear that those around should be tired, or worn out, seemed her only trouble. She took all they gave

her with murmured thanks, and her own sweet smile to the last, never once relaxing her hold of her husband's hand, as he knelt by her, and pained only when she saw the exceeding misery of his face, as now and then he lifted it to hers.

"Let me see the sun," she said, as day dawned; and, with something of that feverish longing which the dying always have for light, she turned her eyes towards the window. "The Sun of Righteousness," Sir Stephen heard her faintly say, and then Mr. Howard read the Commendatory Prayer. Yet a few moments more of stillness, during which Sir Stephen's face grew more rigid and death-like than hers on whom he gazed; and then a last low sigh, and he was left desolate, and his children motherless. But for her—she had fought the good fight, she had finished her course, through Him whose grace was sufficient for her, and for those like unto her—of whom there are more amongst us than we in our blindness and ignorance may discern—what shall we say—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"—see the King in his beauty, in the land which is very far off.

We measure the fame of the dead warrior by his battles, of the statesman by his successful efforts for his country's good, of the poet by his

imperishable works, but the life of a quiet and gentle woman like Millicent Legh leaves behind it a memory more precious, perhaps, than any of these. Who shall dare to say where or when the influence of a faithful, true-hearted wife and mother shall end? Who shall say how far that influence may reach, or over whom it shall have been exerted? It is not given to us to know or to register this. But let it encourage the meek and the poor in spirit, to remember the words of Jesus are to be linked with their names; the blessing and the promise of inheritance here, and in the kingdom which cannot be moved.

The weeks had gone by, and the heavy sorrow which had again fallen over Sidcote had been talked about, and in many instances felt as an individual loss. And then people had returned to other topics; and other griefs, and other joys engrossed the thoughts of the world generally. Again a May evening, very like that one six years before, when Sir Stephen Legh brought home his fair young wife, and he is standing by her grave, in the churchyard of St. Mary's. There can be no doubt that he is altered now, his erect figure is bent, and his once firm step falters, while lines of sorrow soften the outline of his mouth. The evening shadows are gathering round the church,

and the light is faint and dim, when he turns away and enters the Vicarage garden.

There in her old place in the drawing-room Mrs. Howard lies; there Maurice plays his twilight music, and Sir Stephen pauses to listen at the open window. Ida Gardiner's voice accompanies the piano, and the words come as a message of peace to Sir Stephen's heart, so appropriate are they:—

"The peace of all the faithful,
The calm of all the blest;
Inviolate, unvaried—
Divinest, sweetest, best.
Yes, peace! for war is needless;
Yes, calm! for storm is past;
And goal from finished labour,
And anchorage at last.
That peace, but who may claim it?
The guileless in their way—
Who keep the ranks of battle;
Who mean the thing they say."

There was a pause, and Sir Stephen went into the house. They had seen him pass the window, and hastened to meet him. Changed, changed indeed he was in the very gesture with which he bent over Mrs. Howard's sofa, and returned the greeting of her son and Ida.

He took the tea they offered him, and talked for a few minutes on the beauty of the

evening, and inquired if everything was made right at the Vicarage, which had suffered from the Kennedy's reign there. Then he told Ida how glad he was she had come to welcome Mrs. Howard home; and reported how Evie and Elsie had returned from their day at the Vicarage full of Aunt Ida's praises. When he rose to go, Sir Stephen asked Mr. Howard to walk up the Park with him. They turned into the shrubbery, and there, in stillness and seclusion, these two naturally proud and reserved men ratified their friendship.

"Every wish of hers is sacred," Sir Stephen said. "You know how she told me that last morning to send for you, that she might entreat you to come back. That was not all. The enlargement of the church was her most earnest desire. It must be done at once. I have already communicated with the architect, and he is coming down to-morrow. The sittings will be free and unappropriated for ever. I propose to add the transepts to her memory and her child's. You had better meet Mr. Guest to-morrow, and make any suggestion you wish."

Mr. Howard did not speak, and Sir Stephen went on. "In times past you and I have wilfully misunderstood each other; for her sake

let it be so no more. I see in you one who will labour here for the bringing in of sheep to the fold of the Shepherd. Try to see in me a broken-hearted man who will at least bless you for all your efforts, and will thank you for help to follow her in her life as in her death. She was too sweet and gentle for me. God's dealings are just, but she has taught me to believe they are all in love, which I never believed before. I have tried to endure the many strokes which God has seen fit to let fall upon me. I have tried to endure bravely, and thought I had succeeded. I tried, even when our Randolph was taken away from me, to bear up against the weight of sorrow, but I was angry and I thought it hard, very hard. Now she—the desire of my eyes, the light, more than I knew, of my daily life—is gone; it is the setting of the sun, as far as earthly things are concerned, for me; but, thank God, I have learned to love now, as well as to endure; and I see the dawn of better things, which will bring me day by day closer to her."

There was silence again, and then Mr. Howard spoke in low, sad tones. "Forgive me for my many sins against you, and in thought against her who is gone. I judged her harshly

sometimes, God knoweth, and He knows, too, how bitter is my self-condemnation. For the future may He grant me His grace to amend."

Sir Stephen grasped his hand, and Mr. Howard turned back and retraced his steps to the Vicarage, his heart too full for words. Sir Stephen went home, straight to his study, the only room he cared to occupy now. As he entered, there was a sound of movement behind the curtain in the window, and little Stephen slided down from a chair, where he had been perched, with a book, securing the last gleam of light for the story in which he was engrossed.

"Well, Stephen, why are you not in bed? Come here, boy," for the child was creeping away.

Stephen stopped, shaking back his long curls as he did so. "I must go now, or Banks will be angry," he said.

"Not if I tell you to stay. Stephen, would you like to go to school? They will cut off all this, you know," running his fingers through the silken curls.

"I don't mind that. Yes, uncle Stephen, I should like to go to school, if they won't beat me, as Banks says they will."

"Banks is foolish; don't listen to her.

Your mother was talking to me about it to-day."

"Is that what mamma was crying for?" the child asked.

"I don't know; very likely. But you know, Stephen, you will soon be eight, and you must begin to learn something in good earnest. Your mother is going to live abroad again; perhaps she told you so."

"No, she didn't."

"Well, it is true. She is going to marry a gentleman who means to travel. She wants to take you with her, but I cannot let her. It would be bad for you."

"I don't want to go abroad again. Mamma would go and hear the band every evening, and I should be alone. I had much sooner be with Evie, and Elsie, and the baby than that." What is the man's name mamma is going to marry?"

"Marjoribanks."

"Not that old fat man with grey hair we saw at Malton Court when we were there?"

"Yes, Mrs. Marjoribanks' brother-in-law."

I shan't let mamma marry him; she nice and too pretty; she had better stay e."

"So you think. Well, good night, Stephen."

The child was taking his dismissal when Sir Stephen recalled him. His little heart was swelling with wounded affection, he felt so desolate. His mother going to be married, and never to tell him!

As Sir Stephen stroked his head more kindly than was his wont, he burst out into a fit of crying.

"Oh, I wish, I wish Aunt Millicent was here."

The name acted like a spell. Sir Stephen drew the child closer. "Ah, Stephen, Stephen," he moaned, "that is a vain wish."

"She did love me," the child went on, "she did. She taught me to try to be good; and I will try, Uncle Stephen; I will, only I wish—I wish you would love me just a little bit, as she did."

Sir Stephen did not answer, but he put his arms round the boy and kissed him, as he had never done before, saying to himself as he did so, "For *her* sake."

And from that hour a compact of affection was sealed between Sir Stephen Legh and the heir of his house and name.

Mrs. Legh's intentions were even such as Sir Stephen had told her child. Her visits at Malton Court had resulted in her engagement to an elderly gentleman, who was a younger brother of her old friend's husband, and who was completely enthralled by her attractions. But tears and passionate entreaties failed to move Sir Stephen about the boy who was one day to stand in his place, and to whom he was legally appointed guardian; he must not be allowed to fritter away his time at foreign watering-places, his education and training alike neglected.

Florence found Sir Stephen obdurate in this matter, and she also discovered Mr. Majoribanks took quite the same view of the subject.

The child was plainly the one drawback to his expected happiness; and when Sir Stephen said all educational expenses should be his, and Florence's small income left for her sole benefit if his wishes were carried out, he became more urgent in expressing his opinion, that Sir Stephen was perfectly right.

So it was settled that Stephen was to be with his mother in his holidays, when she desired it, and in the coming autumn he was to be placed with a clergyman, at Datchet, who prepared little

boys for Eton, while Sidcote was always to be his home.

Florence Legh has been the jarring chord throughout the story of Millicent's life; and there is not much more to say of her.

That she felt the keenest pangs of self-reproach at times, was undoubtedly true, but she tried to escape from them, and bury the past in oblivion, rather than learn a lesson from it for the future.

The desire of her worldly heart was gratified. Her boy was heir, not only to a name, but to a fortune, and a position which would reflect honour on her as his mother, if she lived to see him take it. She loved and idolized Stephen, had extravagant ideas of his talents, and general superiority to all other children in the world; but she loved herself more. The future as the wife of an easy-tempered man of mature age, good family and affluent circumstances, was infinitely more to her taste than the little home with Stephen, which she had been talking of as her probable portion since her widowhood.

Of men of the world we may well speak with sadness and regret, for the world passeth away. But a *woman* of the world, especially when she has a name to live, and knows what her calling

is, there is not in reality a more pitiful sight. For time goes relentlessly onward, and leaves its traces behind. Popularity must decline—friends fall away—the brighest intellect lose its brightness—the power even of enjoying society fade and fail—old age *must* come, when crowded rooms are a weariness, and to sit through concerts is a penance—sickness may come, when the active and healthy become weak and ailing; and then for her whose foundation is on the sand, ah me! how great is the ruin of that house! She hath loved and lived for the present world, and it slips from her grasp; perhaps only in the last sad days of her failing life does she wake to a sense of her own unreality, what she might have been, and what she has lost. For though haply, in God's great mercy, she turns to the Unfailing Refuge, who can tell what is the wail of her worn-out spirit—over lost days, when living for self, and the praise and pleasure of the world, she missed the praise of God; missed the joy and the bliss—which is of a truth higher than any other earth can afford—of living for others, and following in His steps who went about doing good.

Again, another year has passed away, and the old housekeeper at Broughton Hall is preceding a

lady and gentleman, one afternoon, into the dark wainscoted parlour, which has been made ready for them in the old home of the Veres. The poor old woman is so pleased that she is tremulous with agitation, and apologizes for all imperfections in a confused and bewildered manner.

"We are so shut up here, Mr. Lance—sir—that it puts a body all of a flutter when any of the family do come. As I say, ten times a day, to Peter, 'What a pity it is Mr. Vere don't come home.' There's nothing like native air, Mr. Lance."

"You are quite right, Mrs. Turner; I always feel as if I had taken a dose of quinine when I come to Broughton, but Mr. Vere has a delicate chest, you see, and this air is rather keen for him. But, Mrs. Turner, you must show Mrs. Vere her room."

"To be sure; lor—I can't seem to believe it all, and you looking so aged, if I may say so."

Lancelot Vere laughed, and rubbed his head with a curious gesture. "Ah, Mrs. Turner, the weight of the barrister's wig is too much for us, and leaves us bald when we are but boys. Then I am so dull, you see—I get a trick of rubbing

my skull, to try and wake up my brains a bit."

"Dull! a likely matter, Mr. Lance. Why you were always the genius of the family, you know. I did hear tell, you would be a judge before long."

"Ah! mind when I am, if you are brought before me for any little offence, Mrs. Turner, I'll sum up in your favour, depend upon it. Before we sit down to that charming tea, will you take us through the gallery, I want Mrs. Vere to see the pictures before daylight fails?"

Mrs. Turner obeyed, saying she had opened the shutters in all the rooms, as it was more respectful, and shuffling on before them, with her great keys jingling in her pocket, and throwing open the door of the gallery with a grand air, she was called away by old Peter, the resident man-servant and care-taker, and Mr. Vere and his wife were left alone.

"Try if you can find her out, Ida," he said, as they passed slowly along, looking at the closely serried lines of the ancestors of the Veres—who gazed upon them in return, with their set expression of gracious smiles, or grim determined defiance, or courtier-like nonchalance.

Ida did not speak for a few minutes, but at last the glory of the western sun shone full upon a lady's picture at the further end of the gallery. The same sweet, serious lips, the same loving, truthful eyes—

"That surely is Aunt Millicent," she said, and, but for the old-fashioned high coiffure, the antique short waist, and the little white poodle she held in her long, fair arms, it might have been a portrait of Millicent herself.

"Ah, yes, it is wonderfully like her. We will get that picture copied by young Hayden, shall we? It is far more the look of the inner self of our Millicent than anything we have."

"Our Millicent!" The depth of feeling in the tones of the voice made Ida press closer to her husband.

"We both owe her much," he went on. "She first taught me what a difference there is between the seeming good and the really good; she woke the echoes of my dead mother's word, and preached to me by her sweet and unselfish life."

Ida's tears fell silently; she could not speak, but as she stood there, how her heart responded to all her husband said.

Then, after enjoying the tea, which was sea-

soned by old Mrs. Turner's garrulous talk, as she lingered in the parlour, and which Lancelot was too good-natured to cut short, they strolled in the garden, till the sunshine faded from over the wide-spread downs lying around Broughton, and the evening air came wandering over them with the scent of heather, and the keen invigorating freshness of moorland country. Soon they spoke of her again—of the wife and mother—the sister and the friend that was lost. And it was a pleasure to Ida to trace all the many links which served to hold her sister in remembrance now she had passed away. Sir Stephen's goodness and kindness to her for her sister's sake; his rescue of George from the companionship of Curtis Roberts—paying all his Cambridge debts, and setting him off in one of the Government offices, an appointment he had laboured to get for him. "Then, how beautiful it is to see him with Evie and Elsie," Ida went on; "and how wise and yet how tender he is in his treatment of Stephen Legh. Susan Hayden, who is promoted to be Mrs. Hayden now in the house, says Sir Stephen's love and gentleness with his little girls, and the way he talks to them of their mother is most touching; he does not bury her name in silence as he did those of others whom he loved and lost,

but talks of her to them as present with them, and calls the baby, 'Little Millicent.' "

"That stiff-backed parson, too, Mr. Howard," Lancelot Vere said, "it always strikes me her example had something to do with the change in him. He does not look at one with such an awful condemnatory air as he used to do."

"I am sure of it; indeed Mr. Howard has told me it is so. He was not in the least degree awful on our wedding day, Lance."

"No, we got through that uncommonly well, Ida."

"I am glad you think so," she said, laughing. "How kind it was of Stephen to let me be married from Sidcote. But it was the same there—it was what she would have wished. Oh, Lance, what should I have been without her; how she told me the truth in my wild silly days; and when that crash came, braced me to meet my duty, and try to make poor mamma's life better at Seaforth, and set a good example in economy. I tried very hard, and I think I was of use in some sort. Poor mother! the thought of her is the only cloud now."

"But the great man is as big as ever, is he not? I heard he was doing well at the ship broking."

"I suppose he is; I am sure I don't know. They have set up a carriage again, and he is hankering after getting to know people as much as ever; but mamma is such an invalid I don't think he will be able to have much society, even if it will have him; he is still kind to her in his way."

"The magnificent Julia is the belle of Seaforth, no doubt. Do you think she will still dress like you, Ida? How infuriated I used to be when I saw you coming into a room together, like would-be twins."

"'Used to be?'"

"Used to be. Yes. You don't think I date the story of my love for you from this day four months, when you were good enough to say you would put up with me as I am!"

She looked up, half smiling, half incredulously.

"No," he said, "would that the sun-dial of Ahaz could go backward ten degrees—would that I had tried my fate that first day, then you would, perhaps, have known less of trouble, and unhappiness—escaped falling into a brook for certain, eh?"

"Perhaps?"

"Perhaps? Something of the Ida of that day is left still, then?"

"What day do you mean?"

"The day when I first saw you playing croquet, with a lanky boy, on the lawn at Sidcote."

"Was it *really* then?"

A great flush of delight and affection came over her lovely face.

"Yes, really; but now, Ida, let us remember our compact—let us help each other on to follow Millicent. We won't profess much, but pray God we may *be* what we *seem*—may serve with life as well as lip—above all, love with her love—be true with her truth—and be gentle in our judgment of others with her gentleness."

The church of St. Mary's, Sidcote, is one of the most beautiful in that part of the country. Many people come a little out of their way to visit it, and, perhaps, attend a service there, and remark on the heartiness and devotion which characterizes it. A brass plate tells those who read it, that the north and south transepts—the sittings in which are free and unappropriated for ever—were, with the windows, erected in memory of Millicent, the wife, and Randolph Stephen,

the only son, of Sir Stephen Legh; and beneath one window are the words, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;" beneath the other, "He shall gather the lambs with His arm."

One generation goeth and another cometh; for a little while we are in our place and then we are gone, and others stand where we have stood, and time goes speeding onward to eternity. Blessed indeed are they who leave behind them tokens for good; blessed, thrice blessed, are they who live in the memory of those who have walked with them in the daily paths of the world—live as examples of faithful ones, who have crossed the river and have entered into rest. As they have exerted a gentle influence for good—as they have shown to all men whose disciples they were —as they have sweetened life to their nearest and dearest ones, and with eyes quickened by love, have recognized the little claims of many beyond the circle of home—so let us strive to imitate them, not stretching after great and high-sounding deeds, which fall to the lot of few to perform; but content to do what we can and may do, every hour of every day. Let us so run that we too may obtain, and have our inheritance with His saints, where they shall serve Him

day and night in His temple—His temple, where no sun is needed, for He is the light who hath opened the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.

THE END.

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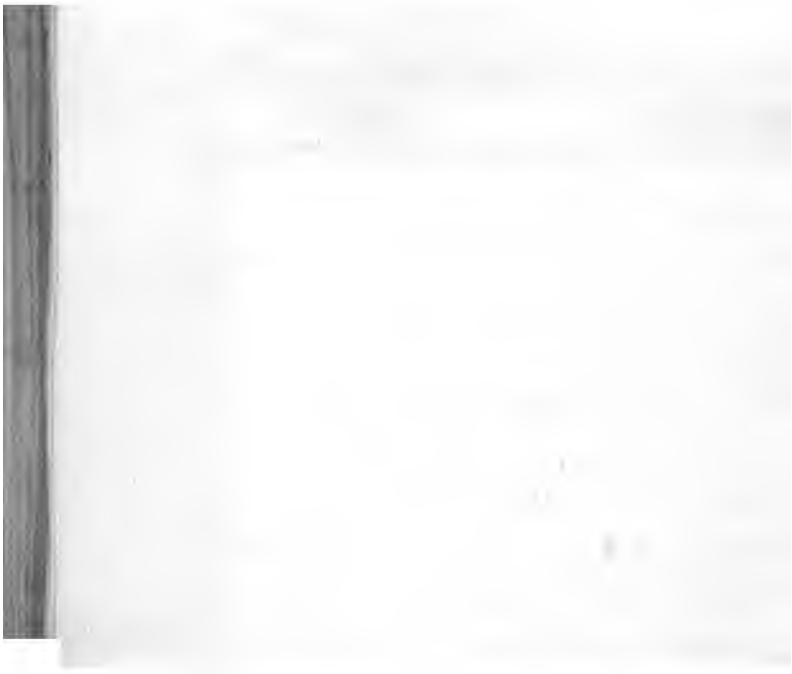

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